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THE
ASCENT OF
WOMAN



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June 1896

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THE ASCENT OF
WOMAN ❧ ❧ BY
ROY DEVEREUX ❧ *Epseud. 1*

Pember-Devereux, Margaret Rose
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ROBERTS BROTHERS
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To

THE MOST DEAR VISION OF HER
THAT SHALL BE

§

Domina non sum dignus!

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OF HER LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

On the Criticism of Woman

I HAVE always found it extremely difficult to write directly for women about themselves and their exclusive interests, much more difficult than to write for the general — by which one means the masculine — reader about books, or pictures, or impersonal things. And in so doing I have never been able to overcome the consciousness of an atmosphere so chill as to be almost antagonistic, and a Presence that grows ever more like the avenging shape of the silence I have violated. Nevertheless I have not even aspired to tell the whole truth about her — not all the books that will ever be written would suffice to contain that. To translate into words some outline of that mirage of her being, which, eluding the gaze of man, has, through the affinity of sex, been

branded on my mental vision, is the extent of the task which circumstances rather than my own will have set me. Yet I feel instinctively that the narrow limits of my intent will not save me from the spiritual ostracism which, though unspoken, divorces me eternally from the bosom of the great All-Mother. The light-bringer has ever since Lucifer been accursed; yet has the glory of this world been builded on the bodies of the free and fearless who spoke and were derided, and died the death only to be honored in the fulness of time. One cannot after all probe to the heart of life without making a wound, nor to the soul of woman without earning her enmity — though wherefore God wot. Even so, what I have written I have written.

For there is, it seems to me, so much to say about woman that has never yet been said. The man who takes the subject in hand merely writes about the women he has known. The abstract feminine is to him a vague and boundless territory, too arctic in temperature and impalpable in outline to come within the range

of his exploring impulse. As a rule he has found the concrete manifestation sufficiently bewildering, but with a light in the eyes or a wave in the hair as extenuating circumstances to an irritating complexity. His studies in the sex are merely the extract of experience. Some woman whom he once loved said this or did that, and straightway he attributes her thoughts and actions to the sex at large, and writes himself down an ideal lover rather than a philosopher. The men who, by dint of a certain feminine quality of mind, united to a large and simply masculine heart, have at the end of a long life something to say about woman that would be interesting, do not say it, except in rare moments of after-dinner confidence, and never write it under any circumstances whatever. The rest do not know anything worth knowing about her, and cannot even express their ignorance in good English. As for the women who write about their own sex, they produce an equally worthless result, for different reasons. The majority of them have never paused to analyze their

own sensations, far less those of their sister women, and it may be accepted as an axiom that the woman who does not know her own soul knows nothing of her sex but the cast of its features and the cut of its clothes. There is again a minority who have drunk of "that brave drink, Life," but whose courage does not match their vitality. These have dared to lift a corner of the veil, have seen half, perhaps more than half, the solution of the feminine enigma, but they wilfully close their eyes and seal their lips. Not by them will the mystery of womanhood be revealed, lest the skeleton behind the shroud of convention should scandalize their fellows. True, they are in a measure powerless to break the conspiracy of silence which eighteen centuries of Christianity have imposed upon them. They know that the average woman cares nothing about the springs of her sentiment, or the source of her life, but is well content to sit and throw flowers on the full tide, so when these take up the pen they write about chiffons and cookery, and all things in sky and

earth, with an airy-fairy flippancy that is supposed to express the temper of things feminine, and the utmost limit both of her intelligence and curiosity.

This is not to say that the superficialities of woman is unworthy any scribe's consideration. One can on the contrary write about dress and society and the game of love in such a way that it shall be literature. To take only the serious side of woman and to write seriously about that, would be to ignore the most potent of her charms, and the most alluring of her pretences. By all means let us write about her doubly-distilled emotions, the brim of her hats, her pseudo-athleticism, and the contour of her slippers. A good treatise on the application of rouge may well be literature when a discourse on her enfranchisement may be mere pamphleteering. One phase of feminine nature is as good as another, as legitimate a subject as any, provided that the writer has that sixth sense essential to the adequate criticism of woman, and a style that is worthy of her. The mediæval monks,

we are told, always took a new pen to write the name of the Lord. In like manner should the modern journalist seek a new word to record his impressions of the feminine entity. How nauseating are the stereotyped phrases and the bleating platitudes with which the ordinary article on woman is saturated, be the writer thereof male or female. To criticise music or painting without some special qualification and some technical knowledge of the art would be considered an unwarrantable presumption. But any callow youth or inexperienced spinster lacking alike in knowledge of life and literary ability is accepted as a competent critic of woman — that creature whom Balzac declared he understood as little as her Creator did. It is of course as necessary to set a woman to catch a woman as a thief to catch a thief. The value of the criticism however depends upon the resources of the woman who rushes in whenever she can provide herself with a pen and a complacent editor. Those who take their mission seriously generally pose as avenging angels, whose

privilege it is to scourge their sisters into acceptance of their own personal ideas and prejudices, and curiously enough the most zealous advocates of "womanliness" are those who never miss an opportunity of reviling their own sex at so many guineas a column, in whom age cannot wither nor custom stale the pleasures of spitting venom at the younger generation which both laughs and wins.

If, as we are often told, the last word has been written about art, the first loyal, luminous word is still to write about woman. Let it not, however, be assumed that I arrogate to myself the glory of having articulated all that has hitherto been mute, and avenged all that has hitherto been misunderstood. To frame a few syllables of the message has exhausted my energies. All that is best in me — such as it is — has gone to insure that those syllables should be uttered with no uncertain sound, to the end that another coming after me may eclipse me both in zeal and faith. If only one woman should pass over the dead body of my thoughts into that liberty where her life is as

she would have it be, I should be well content. That my opinions will prove not only unacceptable but anathema to many a woman who has the misfortune to come across my little book, I realize perfectly and grieve not. "For what am I to Hecuba, what's Hecuba to me?" I desire neither to disturb her peace nor to enlighten her darkness, which is the same thing. I have written these chapters mainly to please myself, because having once laid my hand to the pen, I cannot now turn back nor sit still. But I have also written them because there has come into my dreams a strange phantom of womanhood, akin both to the flesh and the spirit, that is neither wholly instinct nor entirely intellect. And the conviction has grown upon me that the woman of the future will — nay, must be so fashioned, though at the moment she is not one incomprehensible but two incomprehensibles. She will palpitate as well as reflect when she is really regenerate, when she has awakened, remembered, and understood.

There are, however, many things concerning

her which are not yet clear to me. Will her old inheritance pass away when the new heaven and the new earth are hers? However limited the boundaries of her actual demesne, her invisible throne is even now set in a fair place, for is not all nature dominated by the feminine idea, so that the sky is lovely to us because it has borrowed the color of her eyes, and the earth is sweet because it shares its brown with her hair? In this hemisphere we do not regard Nature with the impersonal realism of the Oriental. It has come to possess for us an anthropomorphical significance. In the evolution of an æsthetic sensibility, our instinctive appreciation of human beauty has gradually begotten an analogous appreciation of the earth's loveliness. We have used the same adjectives to express both, until the abstract ideas have become inseparable, and thus all that is fairest in Nature has grown into a symbol of her. Hers is the rose of dawn, the delicacy of the flowers, the murmur of the sea. Their seasons are her seasons, their existence eloquent of hers, for what is spring but the

birth and winter but the death of emotional as well as of natural life. Nor is the kingdom of art less sensibly under the despotism of a white hand. Was not the art of painting born and nourished on the symbol of the divine motherhood, until the pagan revival of the fifteenth century infused a new sensuousness into all pre-existent idealism. In Herbert Spencer's "Sources of Architectural Types," he traces the origin of the ideas of proportion and geometrical symmetries back to the first apprehension of the curves and convexities of the human form. Music again is the very voice and articulation of emotion, a fact which moved Tolstoi to write "The Kreutzer Sonata," and to advance the astounding suggestion that all music should be subject to governmental control.

The relationship of woman to literature stands on a somewhat different plane. Until quite modern times she has regarded books as her rivals possessing over the soul of man an influence antithetical to her own, so that the poet who acknowledged that his only books were woman's looks, paid her as fair

a tribute as any since the world began. In the old days however, the line between them was drawn not fine but straight and narrow as the path of righteousness. The mediæval lover of literature drifted inevitably where monastery walls shut out the love of woman forever and for aye, and the effort to unite these two affections is a purely modern crusade, scarcely yet—perhaps never to be—crowned with complete success. The woman who prefers the man of thought to the man of action is still a seeker after new moons rare among the normal sisterhood, who still succumb to the finest figure of a man in sight, however inarticulate or inane. She again who desires to be loved with the brain is generally prepared to sacrifice something of ardor and more of protection, with a really pathetic conviction that you cannot gather grapes of thorns, nor passionial fervor of a bookworm. This is however an illusion, one of the few which the modern woman cherishes, not being yet enlightened as to its conventionality. For as the Woman is new

so also is the Book, devoted for the most part to the praise of her, or to the paraphrase of her soul. Thus in process of time the book has become, as all other earthly things, her servant, who liveth and reigneth in this decade of the world's story, queen of literature as of life.

And as I finish this superficial analysis of my own sex, I am conscious of a desire, whose sincerity surprises me, that this reign of woman shall endure to her honor and glory. For the first and the greatest of her burdens is the mere fact of her sex. It is strange how acute will wax at times the simple weariness of being a woman. To have escaped this fate is one of the three things for which the orthodox Mussulman blesses Allah every day. Few women, I believe, not even those "undaunted daughters of desires," go down the dusty road to death, without having felt an intense envy of that manhood which seems to take the sting out of consciousness. Yet of all regrets the nausea of sex is the vainest, the most futile. The prize as well as the penalty of woman-

hood still awaits her who has the heart of a lion and the hand of a lily. For that which is strong and fair, and is of the sex of its mother, may yet be mistress of the world, sister to the sun, and free forever with the freedom that is to-day not so very far off.

PART I

Of Her Life

I

The Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge

WHEN a physician is accused of having concealed from his patient the nature and extent of his malady, he sometimes justifies the deception by asserting that a revelation would tend rather to increase than diminish the disease. If we pursue this contention into the domain of the soul, it would seem that Michelet, who found the daughters of his generation *malade* and told them so, was in a measure responsible for the delirium that has supervened. In Michelet's day, however, and especially in Michelet's land, *la femme malade* was yet in the incipient stage of her sickness, and none but he suspected that all was not well with her. But since Michelet has been with the shades, his words have become axiomatic in a way he never dreamed of, and in this country, at least, the malady of

modern woman is a phrase in every man's mouth. With the unconscious irony that permeates the nomenclature of our time, the woman so affected is called "new" — new, that is, in the sense of recent, strange, and unexpected. She is regarded not as an evolution inevitable as any other natural process, but as an excrescence on the face of society, the fungus-like growth of a night. Because the environment out of which she has arisen and the spiritual conditions of which she is the expression are not obvious to the superficial critic, the new woman is to-day the jest of every fool and the *bête noire* of every philosopher. Her enemies will have none of her; her partisans find no fault in her at all. But neither of them has ever swept their mind clear of prejudice and sat down to analyze her essential elements. And yet to probe the motives of her life were to appreciate its significance, and to understand her aspirations were to feel some sympathy with them. That sympathy it is the purpose of these articles to promote.

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That the present incarnation of the feminine spirit bears less resemblance to its immediate ancestress than to that of any previous generation is indisputable. Our ideals are not our mother's ideals, nor our gods her gods, which is not to say that we are bowing the knee in the house of Rimmon. To put aside for a moment the questions of temperament and character, the evolution of the modern woman has been accomplished mainly through the awakening of her intellect by means of education. Taking the women of the past *en masse*, we can disintegrate them into body, a faint infusion of soul, and nothing more. Whatever intellectual qualities the burden of their madonnaship spared to them were so mildewed by centuries of disuse that brain-energy formed no portion of their unleavened humanity. They toiled, they spun, but they did not think, for man was not disposed to encourage the exercise of a function whose presence he almost doubted, reflecting that her creation was a mere afterthought of God. So on through the cycle of time passed the mother of men,

first a beast of burden in the uncouth morn of manners, then a thing "enskied and sainted," when an age of chivalry had dawned upon a world that esteemed virtue "sweeter than the lids on Juno's eyes."

It is impossible here to trace the gradual alienation of the sex from the thralldom of this ideal sentiment. For the second time woman has eaten of the tree of knowledge, and although she has not surely died, it cannot yet be asserted that her system has assimilated the food. This spiritual indigestion is, in fact, the malady that has taken an acute form since Michelet diagnosed its first symptoms, and the cure, at all events, is still to seek. Among the remedies which woman prescribes for herself work is the commonest. Of its infallibility she is almost persuaded, and her faith in it has indeed removed the mountain of prejudice which for long refused to associate the ideas of work and womanhood. But now the gate of almost every industrial field stands open so that she may enter in, though whether the harvest is quite worth garnering is another

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matter. Women have reiterated their love for work with such persistence that men at last believe them, though the woman is yet to be born who really loves work or even knowledge as an end in itself. She may spend her energies in the pursuit of an arduous career for money, or because her life is empty without the excitement of it, or even because she can do it better than most men. But to say that she loves work better than liberty and leisure is a pathetic pretence. Woman will only clamor for work when she cannot exercise the will to live in any other way. Life to her means play, though in nine cases out of ten she would rather work than atrophize. Surely the fact that the New Woman is always trying to persuade herself that work is a blessing when she knows in her heart of hearts it is a curse, is one of the saddest of "life's little ironies." It is only just better than the "tears, idle tears," which used to be her portion. Still if the way of work is but a *via dolorosa* at best, it is also a path of escape. And how beautiful are the feet of those who are passing

from the old prison-house to the new, dreaming the while of freedom.

Man does not, however, take kindly to the woman-worker. He resents her ink-stained fingers, her paint-stained toilet, and her air *affairée* with a sense of personal injury. It renders her dangerously indifferent to him, to his protecting arm, to his indisputable opinion, even to the love which was her whole existence in the dear dead days of her dependence. It makes him realize all unwillingly that, although she was created as an after-thought, God has not forgotten anything — neither soul, nor mind, nor strength. Knowledge may be a curse, but it is also a kingdom, and nature is, after such long delays, fitting her hand to the sceptre and her brow to the crown, though it doth not yet appear what she shall be. When all is told (if all ever is told concerning woman) it will be seen that the passion for power is burning the soul of the modern maid away, though still she “lets concealment, like a worm i’ the bud, feed on her damask cheek,” as Shakespeare said of a passion quite other. Women who

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have beauty rule the world remorselessly through the medium of the senses, but now the women who have it not are learning to rule in another way. Through cultivation the intellect has developed its own emotions, which is simply to say that the emotional capacity of a woman can be perverted from the service of the senses to the service of the mind. By almost imperceptible degrees the attraction of art supersedes the attraction of actuality till it ends by absorbing the whole being. Æsthetic passion can only be indulged at the expense of human passion, and the sterilization of natural instincts follows as an inevitable result. At this point man begins to rail at the sexlessness of the New Woman. He has prepared a dish of love for her since the world began. It is the only *plat* he knows how to cook, and now, for the first time, she has no appetite for the banquet. That it is badly cooked, so overdone that no piquancy is left in it, never occurs to him, nor that woman has turned to more ethereal food out of sheer disgust at a diurnal *réchauffé*. If the modern Eve is a sexless

creature, man has largely his own clumsiness to thank for it. For the rest, she has not yet had time to regain her moral, mental, and physical equilibrium. Having starved for centuries, she has now to recover from the surfeit of intellectual dainties to which she has helped herself with both hands. They are so fresh, so new, so fair, these sensations of the spirit, and upon them is the savor of life unto life.

Other incongruities there are which result from this maladjustment of the mechanism of her being. Such lack of balance is common to all imperfect and embryonic creatures. To gain much without losing much is the privilege of proficiency, and the modern woman is proficient in nothing save in the art of misrepresenting herself. She has become an intelligence, but she has ceased to be a delight, and the cultivation of her intellect has been accomplished at the expense of every grace of person and charm of manner. There is nothing essentially antithetical between a dress made by Doucet and a love of literature, or a good

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complexion and a knowledge of Greek verbs. The secret of their reconciliation in the same person woman has yet to learn. How to pass from ignorance to scholarship without becoming "diablement changée en route" is a problem which the modern Corinne has not yet permitted to ruffle the sublimity of her self-esteem.

II

The Value of Love

WHEN we come to consider the woman of this time as she stands in regard to love, we touch the essential point of her dissimilarity to the woman of the past. If a vein of romance runs through her—and the modern woman is often romantic though never sentimental—love is still in her estimation the best thing in life, bearing, nevertheless, about the same relation to it as a fantasia does to an opera. To her it is a luxury, inessential though delightful, bringing with it the keenest of human sensations and the most ephemeral. And this conviction of the poignancy and the evanescence of sexual affection lies at the very gate of desire, at once quickening it and quenching it. But that sublime faith in love which has been a living spirit in the soul of

"Eve throughout the ages" has gone down before the eyes that are at last unbandaged and the mind whose perceptions have been whetted by education into seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. In the love of the modern woman there is not a shred of illusion, though it lacks neither subtlety nor intensity. Even at white heat she has never *l'air de croire à son bonheur*. For the difficulty of believing in her lover, which wrung the heart of Mariana and her sisters, has vanished before the much greater difficulty of believing in herself. As a matter of fact, the instincts of fidelity are not in her. She is not, like her grandmother, a fixed quantity, in whom the prepossessions of youth deepened as the years passed. In the good old days life moved on leaden feet, and love kept pace with it. A girl then embarked on her first passion with the firm conviction that it was going to last her lifetime, and as a result it frequently did. At fifty she was practically the same creature as at twenty, and the same love sufficed for both decades. She was

faithful by nature as well as by obligation, and knew as little about her sensations as a cabbage does about its growth. Love was to her merely the ante-chamber to marriage, and the idea of pursuing it for its own sake never dawned upon her placid soul, wherein only known gods were deified and domestic ideals cherished. Nowadays the dust lies thick upon all these. Life is no longer sluggish but ardent—earnest, impetuous—its waters whipped to fineness, and its stream swift. It has washed many new things within her reach, new perspectives, new aspirations, new affections. As her nature blossoms it hungers for fresh food at every stage of its development—interests with a pulse in them—sensations with a bloom on them. How should the man of her maiden favor fulfil the need of her maturity? To every season its book and its bonnet; why not also its love?

So at each renaissance of passion her spirit, drifting among the ghosts of disembodied kisses, has a faint foretaste of those yet to

come. Nor is this the limit of her consciousness. With that realization of her nature's complexity comes the prescience that no one man will ever learn it thoroughly. Thus she moves among men, taking whatever seems good to her—from this man intellectual sympathy, and practical assistance from that. From one an idea, from another a caress, without, however, being prone to real affection in any sense of the word. The woman of culture is always reluctant to give any man a lien on her soul, and fearful of submerging the independence of the spirit in the contact of the flesh. Although she may take love as an anodyne to deaden the *peine forte et dure* of thought, she shrinks from even a temporary abnegation of that intellectual attitude towards things which she has purchased at the price of her peace. Yet she is rarely indifferent to the pleasure of being adored. It is often the least responsive women whose desire for love is the most imperious. The others are satisfied with less, being absorbed in their own impulses.

But she who is laodicean herself resents that quality in her lover. In the presence of the love that is more than love she feels like a cat lying in the sun, though if the sun is an unconscionable time a-dying she reads its requiem. It is only the man nowadays who "in love's deep woods will dream of loyal life."

For this cheapening of love two things seem to be responsible, and of these the first is the decline of religious belief. It was mainly the early interpreters of Christianity who preached the subjection of woman. Fear of priestly execration and Divine vengeance kept many women honest; and now that the Church has lost its authority for some consciences, and the truth of its tenets is questioned, a certain loosening of the moral tension in woman has supervened. Besides this, the dissemination of democratic doctrines has taught her that she is an individual—a human being, instead of a mere function, with rights and liberties of her own—the right to love or not to love, the liberty to give or withhold. Thus has love

come to be an episode instead of the main issue of existence, its sole occupation, and its single idea. In the house of life there is only an attic now for Cupid, instead of a great wide room.

Still, with the awakening of the intellect there has been a coincident awakening of the senses. All through the centuries the physical faculties of woman have either lain dormant or have been exercised instinctively without comprehension. Now, for the first time in her progress towards perfect knowledge, their significance has been revealed to her, and as yet she can think of nothing else. The momentary consequence of this absorption in the physical aspect of everything is disastrous enough. Every problem in heaven and earth is brought to the edge of this newly acquired consciousness, and the she-animal is abroad cursing man's monopoly of the *joie-de-vivre*. In those cases where the curb is not irksome to her, she demands that he shall wear it likewise. But the persistence with which she parades her "scourged white breast" throws a

strange irony into her exigent virtue. The virtue that has never been assailed is, if not the worthiest, certainly the most blatant. There are some shrieking sisters whose isolation is hardly open to doubt. It has all the bitterness of a passionate regret. Some women there be who live their lives unto themselves, and yet are full of sweetness to the end; but there are others who wither into a career of active malevolence that masquerades under a thin disguise of militant modesty. The sole satisfaction those women get out of life is in preventing the well-favored of their sex from accepting the love which man has denied to themselves. Their crusade may make for the welfare of the world, but for that they do not care a jot—these *Vierges du mal* with an oriflamme in the place of the lily.

There is, to the student of tendencies, an indescribable pathos in this new order of things. At the moment woman seems still to be floating amid the mists of her lost illusions, on fire with the passion of the impossible, sick unto death of her outworn ideals, and girt

about with the incense of strange prayers. Having forsworn the service of love she would still retain the beauty of life, and wander over "the crooked hills of delicious pleasure" without forfeiting the old-world sanctuary. She would sin and yet not suffer; she would pluck the "roses and raptures" of passion, and yet be white of soul. But until she learns that love cannot be bought at store prices, she will drift deathwards undelighted and unshriven — a follower after empty symbols and impotent divinities. Yet will this quickened consciousness lead eventually to her perfecting. The quiescence of ignorance is gone forever, but inertia is not serenity after all. Only through knowledge distilled over the fire of experience can woman pass from the sphere of delirium in which she now lingers, to the place where the desire of the flesh and its satisfaction becomes an inconsiderable incident in life, instead of the aim and end of it. Having just discerned the falseness of the sentiment on which her rule of life was founded, she is still burning with the memory of many secret

flagellations and many open expiations of joyless and purposeless sins. But as this feeling dies out and goes the way of all indignations, the woman of the future will put on the robe of self-repression in which man wrapped her round aforetime. Only she will realize that which she voluntarily renounces for the benefit of the race, that the blood of her sons may be pure and their souls unstained. Having tasted the new wine of life, she will understand that the old is better.

III

The Practice of Marriage

CONSPICUOUS among those things whose popularity is on the wane is the form of alliance called matrimony. That inconsiderable faction of which Mrs. Mona Caird is the self-anointed priestess would have us sweep the ceremony away altogether into the dust-heap of dead conventions, and from time to time persons of more moderate views put forth suggestions for its amendment. None of these reformers are very coherent. They will not plead guilty to the accusation of advocating free love, and they have hitherto failed to elucidate their real desires to the average plain listener. But although these abolitionists have as yet few adherents, and marriage continues to be the same State-and-society-supported institution it has ever been, an increasing

disinclination to marry, or rather a vague distaste to it, has shown itself among the young of both sexes. Mothers with daughters find it difficult to get any man to take them to his bosom unless they are well endowed with beauty or dollars. The more eligible the bachelor, the less inclined he is to barter his freedom for a few chaste smiles and a little practised indifference. He has acquired expensive tastes and an aversion to self-denial which nothing short of a landed property lacking heirs is strong enough to overcome. And even with this inducement to marriage he is likely to postpone it till the adventures of adolescence have lost their savor. It is true that he may, after forty, become enamoured of the matrimonial idea, but whether or not he puts it into effect will depend upon the balance both of his vitality and his fortune. The woman, again, is actuated by different considerations. She is handicapped at the start by her numerical superiority, and the consciousness that her "pure and disinterested desire for an establish-

ment" may fail of realization through sheer lack of opportunity to extricate herself from the herd of superfluous women. Added to this, the modern maid has thoroughly broken away from the belief that any husband is better than no husband at all. The reproach of spinsterhood has to a great extent passed away, and since it is now not only possible but profitable for women to work, many of them are more disposed to take up a profession than a partner for life. The critical faculty has, moreover, been quickened by education, so that the *demoiselle à marier* now bears little resemblance to the simpering innocent who accepted without question the man of her mother's choice. To-day, proposals of marriage are addressed to herself and answered by herself, and she is more prone to rejection than to acquiescence, for as a rule she is bent upon getting more out of marriage than there is in it.

At the same time these agitations for the abolition of matrimony as an institution would

be more mischievous than beneficial if they gained ground, which they are unlikely to do at present. It is true that at this intermediate stage of her development the modern woman is unable to adjust herself to the old conception of marital obligations. It may even be that a small section of women are unfit for marriage altogether. That, after all, is nothing new. The infinitesimal minority of the matrimonially unfit has always existed, and the fact that it has recently been crying in the market-place does not prove it larger than ever before. Since the laws are only fashioned to secure the greatest good of the greatest number, any attempt to legislate for the exceptional woman would be a manifest injustice as well as an absurdity. Thus if she cannot bring her idiosyncrasies into concord with the conjugal code, the sooner she realizes that the fault is in her own temperament and not in the institution, the better for her peace of mind. Such women must ever be a law unto themselves, for it is nature herself who has ranged them on the rebel side. But the

great mass of women still find in the marriage tie their best protection. In any less permanent relationship it is the woman who suffers almost invariably, and as yet no scheme has been devised which shows a possibility of working as well, or which attempts to provide for the adequate disposal of children or the transmission of property. So far the philosophers who would teach us how to obtain wives as well as pianos on the hire system have been either hopelessly unpractical or obviously insincere.

The facilities for divorce ought, however, in my opinion, to be considerably extended. If the dissolution of marriage could be more easily effected, we should hear nothing more about the abolition of the contract. By this means relief from marital misery could be obtained by the individual without bringing into every alliance an element of insecurity which must finally tend to the disintegration of society. If women were granted a divorce upon the same terms as men can now obtain it, there would be fewer discordant unions and less

immorality in both sexes. A woman who is chained to an unfaithful husband is not likely to make a model wife, even if she does not arrogate to herself the right of retaliation. As the law now stands, a man may make his wife's existence an agony with impunity so long as he does not resort to personal violence, whereas a mere appearance of infidelity is often sufficient excuse for him to obtain a release from his obligations. Not only justice but expediency demands the alteration of this law, which is a mere survival of the obsolete disabilities that surrounded the *femme couverte*. I am, moreover, all for increasing the facilities for divorce in other directions. That either man or woman should be bound for life to a felon, a lunatic, or a dipsomaniac, seems to me a monstrous thing, entirely incompatible with nineteenth-century civilization. It is urged, by those who object to any mitigation of the marriage laws, that the criminal may come out of prison, that the lunatic may be restored to reason, and the inebriate to sobriety. But the fallacy of such reasoning will be perceived when we reflect that

regeneration is equally possible to the adulterer or any other sinner. It would surely be easy to place such restrictions on the operation of the law as would prevent either party from obtaining a dissolution on the pretext of temporary insanity, occasional intoxication, or even of criminal offences of a slight character. But I contend that protracted drunkenness, or insanity and felony, should be held sufficient grounds for divorce quite apart from any breach of the seventh commandment. As a rule the martinets for the durability of the marriage tie have nothing more conclusive to urge against this extension than the old thin-end-of-the-wedge argument, as if this era was not full of the thin ends of wedges that have no thick ends.

To the sociologist, however, it is somewhat difficult to be optimistic concerning the future of marriage in England. The fact that it is far more obviously and persistently a failure here than in any other European country, cannot be altogether ignored when we come to the ultimate utility of things. To abolish the

institution would merely have the effect of reducing society to chaos, but the practice of it might well be amended. In no other civilized country are conjugal habits such as they are in England to-day, not only in the lower and middle classes, but in the upper classes also. However much space may be at their command, husband and wife pass at least half their lives within the same four walls in an intimacy that violates every instinct of refinement in the woman and every feeling of decency in the man. What element of romance, what vestige of the beauty of love, can survive an association so close and so continuous? Take, for instance, the case of a marriage between the average Englishman and a girl who has all life's mysteries to learn. Granted that each loves the other and desires to preserve that affection. If the husband is a man of fine fibre, he begins by regarding his wife as a sacred thing, but the conjugal customs of this country soon sweep away all sense of her divinity both in his eyes and her own. Without their being actually conscious of it,

this odious familiarity breeds contempt between them, and once that personal reserve is broken down on which self-respect is founded, love becomes a mere habit, or dies out of sheer disgust, according to the temperament of the two persons. The revolting character of this intimacy—which is not founded on any true conception of marriage—and its consequences are at the root of the modern woman's aversion to matrimony. In her horror of these habits she is apt to blame the institution, when the customs of the Teutonic race are alone responsible. There are still, however, young wives who are incapable either of analyzing the cause of their discontent or of establishing saner and sweeter relations in their homes. They feel that their marriage is a failure, but they do not know why, still less do they dream how only it might be made a success. So long as wives permit their husbands to come and go in their apartments without let or hindrance, just so long will marriage prove a failure, except in cases where natural absence of refinement prevents the inevitable friction. Marriage is

essentially an honorable estate, but the Teutonic interpretation of its unity has gone far to discount its promise of felicity to the women of this land.

IV

The Maternal Instinct

IN the original woman, who was nothing more or less than *la femelle de l'homme*, the impulse towards motherhood was spontaneous and almost invariable. Even after civilization had begun to produce the inevitable sophistication, that primitive conception of her part in life not only lingered but gained a spiritual sanction after the birth of Christianity. The idea which inspired the worship of Isis and Horus and the cult of the Madonna and Child were one and the same. Each was the divine type of the human woman exulting in the fulfilment of her destiny, living mother and living son. Man saw in the sex nothing but the great All-Mother, and expressed his sense of the dignity of her vocation by burning candles before an image of the *Mater Dei*. Art at

its genesis became aware of the plastic beauty of woman only through the fact of her maternity, and grew strong in the ceaseless reiteration of this phase in her existence. Countless pictures of the Holy Family bear witness to this fervid matriolatry, and man, following the lead of art, unconsciously assisted the gradual submergence of the woman in the mother. From time to time in the world's history she made spasmodic attempts to shake off this yoke. But the suckling of fools and the chronicling of small beer had been accepted as the whole duty of woman for so long, that not until the great upheaval of this age-end did any other aspect of her as a sex dawn upon the intelligence of man. After centuries of motherhood, woman at large is beginning to be simply—woman.

With her majority of over a million, the English maid has no certainty of an eventual maternity, even if she desired it, which she frequently does not. Disinclined as she is for marriage, she is far less disposed to bear children, partly out of resentment against the

Madonna ideal to which she has hitherto been chained. The only woman at the present time who is willing to be regarded as a mere breeding machine is she who lacks the wit to adopt any other *rôle*, and now she is the exception instead of the rule. That the zenith of her youth should be spent in the meaningless production of children born into a country already over-populated, seems to the woman of to-day a sorry waste of vitality. She is the very antithesis of the one unceasing mother whose reckless fertility ruined her mentally and physically at thirty, who had no time to be lovely or loving, to learn the art of life, or the joy of living. The daughter of this generation has discovered other uses for her womanhood, things that conserve instead of exhaust, that are intentional, not merely accidental. She does not despise maternity, as is so often urged against her; but the cultivation of her intellect has enlarged her sense of human responsibility. It has enabled her to penetrate to the core of truth, instead of being content with the husk of convention,

and already she has seen enough to make her recoil with horror from the heedless motherhood which was accounted the glory of the instinctive woman. Such maternity may be natural, but it is scarcely civilized, and to call it divine is sheer cant. Yet because the new woman is inclined to give things their right names, and because she refrains from exercising her capacity for motherhood to the utmost, she is accused of inability and unfitness to bear children at all.

Degenerate at least she is not either in mind or body. The brain rescued from torpidity and filled with knowledge will become her son's by inheritance, as well as the acute perceptions which extended sympathies have developed. Nor can she be found guilty of having cultivated her intellect at the expense of her health. Since the doctrines of hygiene have been preached in the land, and field sports have taken the place of needlework as a recreation for girls, the average English-woman compares favorably in point of

physique with the woman of any other race or clime. Never has she been so sound in wind or limb as she is to-day, so well constituted to be the mother of a strong and sturdy race. But she has turned the calm cold light of criticism upon her eternal mission, as upon everything else in the universe. She looks out over the land, upon the surging, seething mass of humanity, half having no right to life and who must, in obedience to a remorseless law, perish that the fittest may survive. Is it any wonder that she is fearful of bearing children, who will merely swell the crowd of the impotent, foredoomed to failure from their birth? For the first time since her creation woman has begun to doubt the morality of producing children under unfavorable conditions; children who lack the physical and mental stamina to wrest success from an adverse destiny, or the fortune to buy it on easy terms. Her experience of life and her clearness of judgment teach her that, if she has neither health nor wealth to give her offspring, morality requires her to go childless

all her days. She is forced to the conclusion that maternity is just as much a luxury for the robust and the rich as marriage ought to be. Neither at least was ever intended as a profession for the unemployed. If either husband or wife, or both, are the victims of disease or poverty, the path of sterility is obviously the way of righteousness. Yet even in this age of enlightenment the moral obliquity from which woman has suffered since the beginning is not entirely cured. The number of those who have found the courage to face this great problem, and to divest it of the false sentiment which time has woven round it, is still inconsiderable. Children are yet born daily, hourly, into this overcrowded kingdom, cast like human flotsam and jetsam to drift in the undercurrents of life till the inevitable disaster wrecks them on the quicksands of the world at the inevitable end.

Even the modern matron has only taken a step or two on the right road. She is still remote from the wisdom of the ancients, having as yet only learnt when to abstain. The art

of motherhood is still unknown to her even in its rudiments. We are far enough from the spirit of the old Greeks, who levied a fine on Archidamus, king of Sparta, because he had not chosen the mother of his sons with wisdom. We prate about heredity, but miss its message; so the tainted blood and the crooked brain are transmitted from father to daughter, from mother to son, with as little concern on the part of the parents as if they were giving their children dollies or sugar-sticks. Most women desire beautiful children, whose beauty will enhance their own, and healthy children, who will not be difficult to rear. But that both depend upon her care of her physique and her choice of a husband rarely occurs to her, certainly never influences her selection. It may be that the Greek theory of breeding beauty was more fantastic than practical. When Galen was asked by an ill-favored father how to prevent his progeny from inheriting his features, he advised him to surround the nuptial chamber with statues of Venus. History is silent as to the result of the scheme, but the

germ of a sublime science, as yet undiscerned and unformulated, lurks in the old idea. Woman has scarcely yet realized that she is responsible for the health of her child, and that to propagate disease by the exercise of her maternal function is a sin. That the bequest of beauty is also largely an act of volition is the suggestion of a philosophy too transcendental for feminine acceptance in this insensate era.

The ancients came, nevertheless, nearer to truth in these matters than we have yet come. The dual classification of woman as the divine mistress and the divine mother expressed an appreciation for essential diversities of which we have no intimate cognizance. As the adoration of the Virgin Mother superseded the worship of Venus, the children of the goddess still yielded her heart-service, even while the rest of the sex strove through a perpetual maternity to live up to the ideal of miraculous motherhood which the Church raised for their example and edification. And in these latter days, when women are acquiring more or less

the courage of their convictions, those who were never destined by Nature for maternity will have none of it. Unfortunately for the future of the race, they are the very flower of their sex, women who possess that beauty which Plato esteemed as the supreme good, supplemented by an intellectual arrogance which centralizes the vitality and sterilizes its impulses. To the woman of this orchidaceous type perfection, not propagation, is the law of being, for she holds that beauty is an end in itself not to be bequeathed, nor transmuted, nor begotten. For herself and her generation she is all-sufficient, desiring only a single meteoric life, barren alike of ancestor and offspring. But although this type exists and endures, the future of woman lies apart from it in an exclusive and responsible maternity that gives to posterity nothing but its best.

V

The Sisterhood of Woman

ALTHOUGH the universal brotherhood of man lies avowedly in the background of the socialistic dream, no zealous Utopian has ever yet ventured to apply the same idea to the opposite sex. The bond of fellowship which exists between man and man simply by virtue of a common sex is entirely absent between woman and woman. It is, in fact, replaced by a fundamental antagonism, a vague enmity which renders the general attitude of a feminine creature towards her kind essentially different from that of the male creature in identical relations. In individual cases this feeling is counteracted by affection or by sympathy, but apart from personal sentiment it remains, severing every living woman from the rest of her sex. To a great extent this arises

from woman's incapacity for impersonal feeling or abstract emotion. In life's fray she fights either for her own hand or, more often, for some one man or woman whom she loves, but rarely for the welfare of her sex at large. Were it not for this strange lack of humanity in her nature, the emancipation of woman would not have been so grievously retarded. If the few women who suffered aforetime under the restrictions which hedged in their liberty had been able to count on the sympathy and co-operation of all women, the time of their subjugation would have been enormously abbreviated. As it was, the first seekers after freedom met with more opposition from their own sex than they did from the other; nor, indeed, do they fare better to-day. It was not the great mass of womanhood who worked to obtain the Married Women's Property Act, nor the restitution of their municipal rights, nor the vindication of their personal rights by the Jackson case verdict. These enormous changes in their social status were effected by an inconsiderable minority of women brave

enough and logical enough to impress the male powers that be with the justice of their demands. But for their courage they received no sympathy, and for their success not one word of thanks — nothing, in fact, but execration from the huge inert feminine mass in whose service their strength was spent.

It is in fact this essential disunion, this lack of cohesive power, which makes the economic position of woman what it is. The work which she is now doing with her might she owes more to the self-interest of the employer than to her own energy. In many fields of labor women are ousting men from employment, because their work is as well done as men can do it, and done at about half the price. The emancipation of the woman-worker simply means that the capitalist has found the cheapest labor, and makes the best bargain he can. When it is struck the woman wails that she is underpaid, apparently unconscious that the remedy lies in her own hands. If each woman who works were to adopt the tactics of man and combine for the common benefit,

instead of standing alone and making her own terms, the value of her labor would soon be equal to his. But this is just what she cannot do. She cannot form an alliance with her own sex, either offensive or defensive, and respect its covenant. That is why trade unionism among women is still almost a farce and its operation ineffectual, and why the associations formed by women for their betterment and governed by them are so apt to become disabled through internal strife. Whatever strength there is in woman, it is not the strength of unity: far less are equality and fraternity sequels to the liberty she claims. At the moment her most pretentious claim is for parliamentary enfranchisement. I am not here concerned with the justice — or injustice — of the claim, but with the contention that its success or failure depends almost entirely upon herself. If all womanhood were to demand the vote as with one voice, the days of her exclusion from political activity would be numbered. For the present obstacle to her obtaining it comes not so much from man's

disinclination to grant it as from the passive antagonism of those women who do not want it.

Yet there never was a time when women were so interested in their own sex as they are now, though whether this interest is due to an impulse of morbid curiosity or to a genuine human sympathy is open to question. It is certain that an increasing number of women who are morally stainless give evidence of an extraordinary absorption in the character and condition of those whose lives are notoriously and avowedly vicious. Formerly, the barrier which separated the virtuous among women from the fallen was absolutely definite and impassable. On the principle that to touch pitch is to be inevitably defiled, those within the fold held no communication with the outcast, whose very existence they were expected to ignore. Of late, however, the pharisaical passing-by on the other side has been replaced by an abnormal attraction towards the gutter, and virtue's crown of virtue is won by devising schemes for the redemption of the fallen and the purification of the sinner

through intercourse with the saint. There are those who profess to perceive in this association the germ of a brave humanitarianism, the inauguration of a new and fervent charity that presages an era of feminine fellowship and amity. To my mind it has no such significance, but is simply a form of hysteria based upon a morbid appetite for coquetting with sin, so characteristic of the modern woman. The kind of sin which she has neither the opportunity nor the desire to commit has a fascination for her perverse, *fainéant* soul. She is like the little betrothed bride in one of Marcel Prévost's stories; and with charity's patchwork quilt for a cloak, she satisfies her curiosity by coming in contact with those who have drunk the cup of knowledge to the dregs. Yet her inveterate habit of throwing dust in her own eyes no doubt obscures the underlying motive of her devotion to what is called "rescue work." A vague pity for the Paula Tanquerays of this world she is conscious of, a pity which can easily be made to sound like that inexhaustible

human sympathy which hopeth all things, believeth all things, and endureth all things.

Take, again, the friendship of one woman for another when both stand upon the same moral and social level. It is in nine cases out of ten devoid of the obligations of loyalty and honor which are inherent in the friendship between one man and another. There is less reserve in it and also less sincerity, for a woman will reveal her heart of hearts to a friend and quarrel with her the next day because she has pirated her bonnet or alienated an admirer. Such relations never become stable or sacred between women, for they are apt to begin by chance, proceed with passion, and die at a breath. Even at fever heat a woman never gives as much to another as she gives to her lightest lover, and at any moment she is ready to sacrifice her friend at the behest of any man in whom she is momentarily interested. For his entertainment she will betray any confidence without a scruple or a regret, even if she refrains from denouncing her feminine friend to the first comer as soon

as a shadow of misunderstanding has arisen between them. In the lives of most men there are only one or two friendship-bonds riveted by years of intercourse, which nothing but undreamed-of treachery can sever. Women, on the other hand, make and discard friends with equal facility. If they are seldom true to men, their fidelity to their own sex is rarer far, for there are no Davids and Jonathans among women, no friendships founded on mutual faith and held in honor. Until woman learns to conduct her relations with her own sex on the same principle as that on which men act, the sisterhood of woman will never come within measurable distance of the possible. She has learnt so much from man in this decade that it is not unreasonable to hope she may yet learn the true character of friendship as well as the policy of combination. When woman stands shoulder to shoulder with her sister in public and in private life, she will stand at the very gates of her kingdom, abreast of that "brave vibration, each way free."

VI

The Feminine Potential

IT is somewhat to be feared that those idealists who would fain build in the new earth and the new heaven a shrine for the woman-spirit, find the study of its present manifestation a constant jeopardy to their faith. So far, in fact, have the feet of the modern woman strayed from the environment of beauty, that to guide them once more towards the first step of the golden stair seems like leading a very forlorn hope. However clear one's perceptions may be of the conditions that have combined to make her what she is, the sting of her unloveliness is apt to breed a resentment against her which no philosophy of patience can entirely purge away. The mind, weighing well the provocations, may absolve, but the soul has only cognizance of a misshapen presence calling itself by a woman's

name, though destitute of a woman's charm. And the fact that she is naked of grace yet not ashamed, does not render the task of her championship lighter, nor still the gibes of those who have received a stone when they asked for bread. Man, who sees everything in woman without comprehending anything, regards the present stage of her evolution with dismay and her future with despair. Time had endeared to him the ideals he had fashioned, and prudence enjoined their maintenance. Now her passionate rejection of them has disquieted without enlightening him, and for the moment he stands before the ruin of his peace, scoffing at the false purity which makes a virtue of sexlessness. For his wrath there is undeniably a measure of justification. As yet the modern Eve has only distinguished herself in the swift destruction of those principles upon which her ancestors built their lives. The work of reconstruction is not yet begun, and seems like to tarry till many maids have waxed and waned. In the mean time life has taken on a strange unloveliness, and the

least beautiful thing therein is the New Woman, a half-fledged creature shivering on the brink of a new-made grave, where the glad and simple impulses of her nature lie buried, under cold stones, alive. Of the beauty of life she will have none, having steeped her soul in the sham realism which she mistakes for truth. Everywhere in modern art and literature there are evidences of this concentration on the squalid side of existence, and woman, so susceptible always to the temper of art, has caught the taint of this devotion to sordid actuality. As is also her wont, she has carried the impulse to its last limit, discarding "the splendor of the true" for a spurious naturalism, which is as exclusive in its worship of ugliness as the most ardent æsthete ever was to "that Lady Beauty." It is not too much to say that all the most repulsive characteristics of the emancipated woman have sprung from this cult of the gutter with which she has saturated her spirit.

Indications are not wanting, however, to testify that the day of reaction is at hand.

The first breath of returning sanity has lit the lamp of romance once more, and in its pale radiance the shadowy form of the great goddess may be discerned watching ever for the moment when woman shall again lift her eyes towards the gate of her desolate temple. In the youth of the world the female aspiration was concentrated either directly or indirectly on the achievement of beauty. When "grand Greek Aphrodite" sprang from the sea, the impulse of all womanhood rose with her, exulting in that rare perfection which enshrined the desire of all the ages. To the ancients the ideal of beauty could only be approached through the cult of "the visible fair form," which, transfigured by the Hellenic spirit, inspired a philosophy of life whose materialism is as far removed from the materialism of this age as the Greek idea is from the Teutonic. The color and contour of the body was to a classic people merely the physical expression of grand thoughts and sublime emotions into which considerations of sex entered but slightly. They sought the soul through the veil of the

flesh, and found it in a wave of the hair or a line of the lips, which thus became for them sumptuous symbols of a glorious mortality. So long as the principle of beauty survived reincarnate forever and again, they grieved not that the soul should with the body die the death. And in spite of the sexlessness of the abstract ideal, the divine type which inspired the monuments of Greek art took the form of a woman, for Aphrodite was in her temple then, and all was right with the world.

But the dawn of Christianity marked the supersession of the cult of beauty by an evangel which exalted lowliness beyond loveliness, and which discouraged the cultivation of physical perfection as inimical to the purification of the spirit. A religion based upon a fervent asceticism gradually involved a new conception of the feminine ideal, in which self-sacrifice took the place of self-development. This creed of abnegations, first preached in the interests of ambitious sacerdotalism, and afterwards by the austere zealots of the Reformation, suffered only the feeble gainsay-

ing of art, which, although born in the very citadel of the Church, reverted by imperceptible degrees to a Pagan sentiment. Painters began to label their studies of womanhood indifferently with the name of the Virgin or Venus, and the flowing hair and fluttering hem gave an air of Bacchanalian beauty to the artistic representation of the Madonna, which prevailed during the later years of the Renaissance era. In this country, however, the rise of Protestantism, with its *peine forte et dure*, its sober raiment and more sober life, had a more enduring influence on the feminine spirit; for although it has since emancipated itself to a great extent from the tyranny of puritanism, it still retains unlovely remnants of the mental and moral characteristics that were ground into it as it lay under the iron heel of the Round-head. She has worked out her freedom, but has not as yet found a way to clothe her naked liberty with the garment of grace, and so render it acceptable to all generations of men. As a child who has run away from school finds a keen delight in insulting its absent teachers,

so woman flaunts her defied conventions in the face of man, and fancies herself brave as well as unfettered. She is never weary of declaring her contempt for the other sex and the feminine beauty that man prizes above all human things. The former opinion she emphasizes by parodying his vices and his phrases, his gait and his clothes, with the result that the most faithful supporters of woman's rights are now coming to the sad conclusion that they would rather see her fair than free.

In spite, however, of the long centuries through which she has forsworn her eternal mission, its law is still written on the tablets of her soul, for the intimate association of woman and beauty is no vain thing fondly imagined, but a fundamental interdependence that may be denied for a space, but can never be annihilated. So far the denial of this truth has only brought her to a condition of spurious growth and fantastic activity, which has in it neither the seed of the old peace nor of the new perfection. It has made of womanhood a thing of shreds and patches, — shreds of mis-

directed energy and patches of misbegotten passion. Nor can she ever hope to become a whole and completed creature with "a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting," without the sense of proportion, which is the first element of beauty. She has striven for liberty, and already the keys of the gate of life are in her hand; but if she lacks the wit to make freedom fair, what will it avail her in the end? As yet she has not even knowledge enough to recognize her own incompleteness, her unfitness for work and love alike. Labor that is neither continuous nor co-operative benefits none but the isolated individual, and the world could go on quite well, perhaps better, without it. Neither is the modern woman a greater expert at love. At present she is apt to take it as she has her shoes mended, "while you wait," and when she discovers what a formless, colorless thing is this casual Cupid, she jeers at the sentiment of which it is but the shadow's shade. For love can never be lovely unless the desire of beauty dwells in the soul of the woman who loves. And only through the

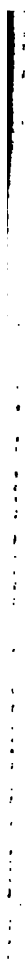
development of this desire will the redemption of woman be wrought out.

This creed may seem at first sight to be nothing more than a diaphanous doctrine fashioned of the stuff that dreams are made of. But a brief study of the principles of beauty will show that the pursuit of it is by no means incompatible with the conditions of practical life. The service of beauty is not an activity but an attitude of heart and mind which, being a subjective influence, touches the personality of a woman rather than her deeds or words. Once in possession of this sixth sense, this exquisite consciousness, even the least beautiful of women may become fair, good alike to the sight and the soul. The world has ceased to pour libations to Aphrodite. Her temple is a ruin, and they who worshipped there have long since lain with all generations of women in the House of Sleep, taking the secret of their beauty and wisdom with them down the steep stair into oblivion. And now, when the world is in its dotage, woman is questing once more that supernal art of loveliness and

life. The person of the goddess survives in the abstractions of the poet and the painter, and in every evanescent expression of beauty that glorifies the natural world. But the feminine spirit is still groping in the darkness after a *Maya* of her own invention — an illusion that allures and eludes, a phantom with no name. The winds of instinct still drive her on the rocks, even as the warning cry of her intellect is ringing in her ears. For the moment she stands at the parting of the ways. Behind her lies the woman of the past prostrate under the weight of her manifold obligations, and before her rises the first pale promise of her infinite possibility, which may, through the service of beauty and the sceptre thereof, flush with its realization the dawn of a retarded day.

PART II

Of Her Looks



I

On the Progress of Fashion

"A LARGE part of the daughter of civilization is her dress," says Mark Twain somewhere, and when he adds, "Some women would lose half their charm without dress, and some would lose it all," one begins to realize why woman, as a sex, fails to appreciate American humor. The truth of the remark is however scarcely open to doubt, though it might be contended that certain adjuncts to the modern toilet go rather to prove the survival of barbaric instincts in the feminine character than that condition of hyper-culture which is supposed to be the last stage in her development. The impulse towards adornment which was responsible for the first elementary suggestion of costume enters largely into the latest confection from Paris; thus it is not in the actual garment,

but in the significance thereof that we can trace the operation of civilization. Dress as a covering has existed since Eve's apron of fig-leaves, and dress as a decoration since pre-historic woman first hung a string of beads around her. Neither sought more than to "look a little dressed and be beautiful," if one may borrow the words that Steele, a true barbarian at heart, addressed to his protesting Prue. The intention was simply the satisfaction of a natural instinct, and the garment itself was without form or coherence, for it was only after the dawn of civilization that woman began to regard dress as a means of creating impressions. Gradually she came to perceive that rank might borrow a greater nobility from silk attire, and that royalty became more regal in a vesture of purple and ermine. Even the baseborn caught the drift of this idea and sought, all unconsciously perhaps, to produce an impression of picturesqueness as they built up a national costume—to each country its own as the initial possibilities of dress became known to them. It was man, strange

to say, who led the way to this goal, while woman came fluttering after his magnificence, like a flight of hen-birds after a gayly plumaged cock. Nature had however bestowed upon her that imitative instinct which the animal creation lacks, and in a century or so she had surpassed him in the race for sartorial sumptuousness. It is moreover worth noting, as a masculine characteristic, that, once rivalled, he gradually abandoned the field; which recalcitrance has brought him to the dingy sobriety of to-day's black. Woman meanwhile made the most of her opportunity, and the rapidity of her development in this direction, one may learn from the gorgeous raiment for which the Venetian painters sacrificed the virgin blue and white of the monkish madonnas. By the time of the golden moyen-age woman had fathomed the utmost potentiality of dress as a means of impression. On the crest of the Renaissance wave she rose, silk-caparisoned, jewel-starred, a very mate for kings.

During mediæval days costume possessed a social significance, giving not a vague sugges-

tion of rank as it does now, but an absolute revelation. As soon as the power of dress to supplement authority was discovered, measures were taken to prevent that power from being nullified by vain repetition. The sumptuary laws which protected costume, as a privilege of nobility, also curtailed any tendency towards extravagance of style or color which might be manifested by the lower classes. A limit was fixed for the length of a shoe and the height of a ruff, so that no mistake was possible as to the social status of its wearer. At this period fashion, as we understand it,—the result of a twofold impulse of imitation and alteration,—had no existence. * Woman had too recently acquired her fine feathers to change them often; for that contemptuous familiarity with new gowns which permits her to cast them lightly and frequently aside is essentially a modern attitude. There were moreover other reasons which compelled her to treat her dresses with respect. Sumptuous materials were not only costly but difficult to procure. They were designed with all the resources of

art to suit a particular style, and in consequence that style had a vogue of centuries. Its adoption was probably due to the fact that it suited the king's mistress, who imposed it upon the other ladies of the Court; for individuality in style, or the adjustment of a robe to its wearer, was then undreamed of in feminine philosophy. The fortunes of war were not without influence on dress, indeed it seems probable that most of the radical changes in style could be traced to the importation of new habits and customs by a conquering race, or to the advent of foreign princesses occasioned by royal marriages. Thus, as woman emerged from the chrysalis and blossomed into the butterfly of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the development of fashion became coincident with her sophistication.

At its inception fashion only meant a change of style affected solely by the more frivolous section of the nobility. Even after the repeal of the sumptuary laws their spirit still controlled the people. The bourgeoisie had no aspirations towards modishness; she was a housewife and

her gait proclaimed the fact. The lower classes again were still wedded to their national costume, which had become a sort of fetich, its more conspicuous glories being handed down from mother to daughter for generations. Each class retained its peculiar costume, and a woman of that day would have seen little difference between stealing a purse and pirating a dress. Fashion did not become imitation in a day, but in process of years. As the lower classes acquired the political privileges and the social habits of the upper class they began to travesty their apparel. This impulse arose out of the growing desire to do away with class distinctions, and the fact that there is now little difference in the outward appearance of mistress and maid is simply the working of the democratic idea in one direction, while the extraordinary advance in the recent manufacture of dress materials and the reduction of their price enables each class of the community to copy the class above it with a superficial verisimilitude. Whatever may be thought of the social and political aspects of democracy, the

deplorable consequence of its influence in the kingdom of dress is beyond dispute. Take the first instance of imitative frenzy — the gradual disappearance of national costume all over Europe with the exception of Russia. Everywhere else the peasant is exchanging the garb that centuries have consecrated to his use for the dingy vesture that helps to make our London streets hideous; while the peasant woman tricks herself out in a cheap parody of the fashions prescribed by Paris for the patronage of the rich. Not even the most rabid socialist can deny that the costume of the English lower classes reaches the very depths of inappropriate ugliness. Let us pursue for a moment the life of a mode destined to a career of popularity. It is born in a Paris atelier and spends its first fresh youth in gay Lutetia, only travelling to London when its bloom has fled. By the time it is full grown, *le monde où l'on s'habille* has got tired of it, and with the approach of middle age it sinks into a suburban vogue, only to filter down through every stratum of society till it

drees its weird on some outcast inhabitant of the city's slums. And from its birth to its death it is essentially the same, but cheapened, vulgarized, desecrated in its descent from the sublime to the ridiculous. As the middle-class citizen reads the *Morning Post* because he feels that to follow the movements of the upper ten is the next best thing to mixing with them, so his women-kind cherish the idea that in copying the dress of some leader of fashion they establish a vague affinity with its aristocratic wearer. They take in an illustrated paper and model their home-made gowns on the sketches of toilets worn at Ascot and Hurlingham, hugging the flattering unction to their souls that they are thus keeping step with the advance guard in the fashionable fray. So on and on it goes, this relentless policy of imitation, while the iron of its monotony enters into the artistic soul, making one hunger for the old restricted way of life, when bread may have been dear, but when one-and-elevenpence-three-farthings was as yet an unknown horror. He was a wag who once lamented

the fact that most women looked best from a back view as one of the saddest things in life. But when all womanhood is indistinguishable from a back view, where are words to express the tragedy of it—the comedy of it—the sorry deadly dulness of it?

For this we have to thank the rise of the democratic spirit which may place the development of the individual among its ideals, but which achieves a quite contrary result in practice. Of late the socialistic proselytizers have begun to realize that the herding together of the masses in model dwellings is tending, not to accentuate individuality, but to obliterate it. The working-woman subject to similar influences copies her mistress's dresses, and Mary Jane *endimanchée*, bearing about the same resemblance to my lady as a chromo-lithograph to an old master, throws a strange irony into the accredited ideals of democracy. There are many explanations no doubt, none of which carry consolation to those who watch the women of this land go to and fro until the evening. They are externally, for the most

part, base replicas of some fair original only visible to the multitude between the door of her carriage and the door of her house or another's. We are told that we wait in the shifting of the fire — that our time is a time of transition wherein the ghosts of the past still make a mock at present. We are told that when the last of these ghosts are laid, and the last of these schemes for social regeneration come to pass, that the individual, clothed and in her right mind, will emerge triumphant from the socialistic bran-pie. In the mean time we reap the immediate harvest of the democratic sowing which, as far as dress is concerned, means a dead level of priceless incongruity unequalled in the history of raiment.

This state of things is doubtless partly due to the absence of stimulation, for although the daughters of Albion are devoted to novelty, they do not appreciate originality in dress, in fact they think it rather bad form than otherwise. The Paris models that find their way into the salons of London modistes have to be considerably toned down before our country-

women can be induced to wear them. Even a new combination of color becomes middle-aged before they give it the stamp of approval. At first sight this exclusiveness seems to arise far enough from the springs of democracy. But an examination of the reasons for its existence will show that the absence of originality in the worker and the dislike of originality in the wearer really generate from identical conditions. I have endeavored to point out that in the former case it is due to the development of the imitative propensity following on the inoculation of the democratic creed. In the latter case that dread of originality is in great measure the dread of imitation. To a woman of the upper class it is impossible to continue to favor a fashion after it has reached the Edgeware Road. A parody invariably inspires a certain disgust for the original, so she gives her gown to her maid when her maid's friends are beginning to pirate it. This they are certain to do with alacrity if there is anything remarkable or dramatic in the design of it. Cut and fit are beyond them, but almost any

design can be travestied, and the more striking it is the more speedy its descent from Belgravia to Brixton. Thus gentlewomen are inclined to pursue a policy of protection in adopting those modes least likely from their simplicity to tickle the fancy of the proletariat, and to rely for their effects rather on inimitable perfection of detail than on originality of design. And it must be borne in mind that eccentricity is not originality but simply a morbid form of vanity, which is in its operations inimical to the interests of dress. Every art is bound by certain immutable canons, and to outrage any one of them makes the delinquent not a pioneer but an alien. If any regeneration is possible it must be evolved, not imported. Personally I should hail a revival of the sumptuary laws with joy even if they necessitated the sacrifice of an adorable dress or two, and what is far less important — the rights of the individual.

II

On the Significance of Style

THE intimate and inpalpable alliance between a literary effort and the author of it, which is expressed in the assertion that the style is the man, exists in an equal degree between a woman and the dress she wears. For although it may not be actually her handiwork, the fact that she has chosen it and worn it, makes it an indispensable fraction in the sum total of her personality — a witness to the faith and the felicity that is in her. This does not of course refer to its accidental qualities, such as fit, color, or material; but to that essence or soul which is called style in all branches of art and which constitutes idiosyncrasy. In a toilet as in a piece of painting or of prose, the presence or absence of style determines the value of the work, and if this one thing needful

should be lacking, no other excellence will suffice to bring it within the province of art. A well-dressed woman is after all one who possesses an acute sense of style, and who uses it to convert herself into "the illimitable poem" that Walt Whitman once called her. Without this sense no woman may hope to see sartorial salvation even if her milliner has a double portion thereof; for vicarious style has merely the effect of making the wearer of a superb garment look as if it did not belong to her. It is emphatically one of those inherent qualities which can be cultivated but never instilled, and is the feminine equivalent to that divine sensibility which seven times purified gives its immortality to art. Thus a woman so gifted will never be entirely ill-clad, even when her dressmaker's capabilities do not rise above mediocrity. She will invest the most commonplace garment with that nameless leaven of fashion and individuality which is best described in the French word *chic*, and will be as a goddess knowing good and evil, even when the perfect is a prohibition

to her. Style is in its essence more of an emotion than an apprehension. At its subtlest it contains an element of sex, an unreasoning reliance on the feminine prerogative, underlying that desire of beauty, which is of course the most obvious stimulant to the exploitation of purple and fine linen.

The great stylist in dress pursues eternally the twofold object of revelation and concealment, and the perfect style is that which accentuates the body's beauty and dissimulates its defects. A dress should be so fair a frame that the flaws in the picture become less apparent, not a mere echo of its banality, nor even a meaningless reiteration of its charm. As regards style however the art of dress has fallen on evil days, for whereas the women of past ages devised in each generation one perfect inimitable pattern and adhered thereto, we drift into divers currents every month, seeking an ideal style and finding none. If in any future of sartorial rationality, some antiquarian should seek to point a moral from the characteristic costume of this decade, he

will be sore perplexed to find an opportune illustration. For a very slight examination of any fashion paper purporting to chronicle the style of this century's last decade will reveal to the judicial observer of posterity that there was no style to chronicle. What we call the style of to-day is no more an offspring of the living present than any other habit or custom which we have inherited from the past. The modistes of the present, even the greatest of them, are absolutely destitute both of creative genius and of inventive faculty. To pervert and vulgarize the glorious styles of yore to suit our eleven-pence-three-farthing existence is all that modern elegance requires of those who minister to it. Contemporary talent is just equal to the materialization of old-time costumes, so that the reincarnations thereof accord somewhat with a latter-day type and condition. So we filch the design of our dresses from the portrait of some fair form or other which is adapted to our chameleon personality by a Parisian man-milliner through the travail of his soul. Thus has style in

modern dress come to mean nothing but skilful adaptation, with its correlatives of cut and fit.

There are, however, certain modifications of these borrowed inventions which have been so divorced from their original intent by the exigencies of contemporary life that they may claim to belong to this day more than to any other. These are twofold — the tea-gown, which is an evolution of the æsthetic impulse in the modern spirit, and the tailor-made costume and the blouse, whose genesis is curiously illustrative of its utilitarian side. But it is the tea-gown alone which reconciles me to this age of hygiene hideousness — yea, and almost to one's sex as well. Time certainly was when the Occident knew it not, for the birth-place of the tea-gown was in the East. The first breath of Oriental influence that reached this corner of the cosmos caused a revolution in the furniture and decoration of our houses. It taught us what comfort was, and made us exchange the decorous curves of our Louis XVI. settees for the divan, the couch, and the cushion. But woman, being

conservative to the marrow of her bones, was not at once initiated into this gospel of ease. To tell the truth, the divan embarrassed her. She had been taught that it was unseemly to recline outside the precincts of her bedroom — indeed, her clothing would not have permitted her to do so had she found courage to brave the expostulations of the decorous. One has only to look at the pictures of our grandmothers, busked and boned till one almost doubts their humanity, to realize why the divan was for so long only visible in the smoking-room, until recent years and circular tickets brought garments from the Orient that had an affinity with its furniture. At the same time the delights of pure Bohea and sweet Souchong were revealed to the women of the West, and in that way the dress, which grew out of the assimilation of the Oriental idea, came to be associated with the Asiatic beverage. To the daughters of this generation the drinking of tea has become an institution, and so, happily, has the tea-gown. But quite lately the two ideas have drifted

apart, and the name is apt to be taken in vain. It has come to be applied to any kind of dress that is not closely adjusted to the figure, whatever its texture may be; but the whole spirit and intention of the tea-gown is lost if its material is not soft and pliant, shrouding, and at the same time expressing, every line of the figure. For this reason no corset should ever be insinuated beneath its flexible folds. To combine the two things, each intrinsically excellent, is an artistic sin, a commonplace, and a vulgarity. The dominant glory of the tea-gown is that it enables the wearer to discover new perspectives of life, an infinity of new attitudes which the presence of a corset utterly defeats. From any point of view a corset is a curb, part of the armor we gird on to protect us in the daily battle of existence. But we are not incessantly engaged in the fray; it is occasionally permitted to be placid, disarmed, mentally and physically, and even optimistic. Now optimism in a corset is a contradiction in terms.

To touch perfection a dress must be much

more than an article of clothing, it must be a revelation of the wearer's individuality. The modern woman, however, seems to elude expression, at least in her orthodox toilets. These are merely adjuncts or foils to the tint of hair or skin, but of that subtle, perplexing soul of hers they tell nothing. Yet you get glimpses of it, if you are discerning, while she abides within a tea-gown, for it fits her mental and moral self as a calyx fits its flower. Its sinuous folds reflect the baffling twists in her temperament, while its every line is eloquent of her eternal mutability. For the tea-gown is a crystallization of the elegances of all time, with something from each century in its composition, like the woman for whose adorning it exists.

That most unenviable vice of economy has somewhat limited the empire of this adorable form of raiment. It is also responsible for that abortive garment called the blouse, which, being essentially a garment of compromise, has found favor with that class whose members are ever engaged in temporizing between Mrs. Grundy

and the pure and disinterested desire to be called smart. At its inception the blouse retained something that suggested the rustic simplicity of its name, for it invariably made its wearer look like a badly set blanc-mange. Of recent years it has, however, been somewhat purged of its original sin, though the fact remains that it exists in response to the vulgar demand that one thing shall do the work of half a dozen things. It is eminently in its intention a useful garment, and it is just that consideration of utility which militates so disastrously against the art of dress, and which has afflicted us with that travesty of masculine attire generally described as a tailor-made costume. One might easily after all find support for the contention that the tailor-made woman is largely responsible for the decadence of poetry in this era of prose. Such poets as we have must e'en submit to the qualifying adjective of minor, possibly because they have found a feminine actuality of blue serge and shirt fronts fatal to the conception of any ideal whatever. Perchance

as the petrifying process becomes complete, the more callous of our versifiers may take to inditing sonnets to their mistress's ulster instead of to her eyebrows, or find material for a quatrain in the vasty deeps of her tennis shoes. If one could but induce some patron of the arts to give a prize for the best poetic rhapsody on the tailor-made maiden, it might give a spur to a rising rhymester and an assurance to the modern woman that she is not lost beyond recall in the arctic regions of prose and pathology.

Yet when all is told the woman of to-day does not exist for the purposes of inspiration. That is a passive rôle which scarcely squares with the rights of the individual, a tenet she is prepared to live and die for. Every poet in the land may hang his harp on a willow-tree, and join the ranks of the unemployed, before she will modify her attire, so that he may get to work again with an "incomparable she," as a subject. This type of woman does not care a fig for *l'inutile beauté*, so long as she can play golf with agility, ride a bicycle in the

wind without turning a hair, and be mistaken for her brother from a back view above the waist. One is bound to admit, however, that the country damsel has no choice. She must be either tailor made or incongruous, for athleticism more or less defined is her portion, whereby she mitigates the monotony of being eternally face to face with nature. A twenty-mile walk can scarcely be undertaken except in a sturdy dress that is more durable than elegant, while most field sports are supposed to demand costumes of surpassing hideousness. Turning back to the town we find another variant of the tailor-made type. Here it is chiefly adopted as a policy of protection against the vast army of London smuts, which the unhappy wayfarer who does not possess a carriage must encounter at close quarters. Life is a dingy tragedy for the students of economy, and so the desire for beauty becomes merged in the striving after mere neatness. One must remember moreover the variety of types which dwell together in this multitudinous city, each exigent of its own style

of dress. And it is incontestable that the exclusively English, the "young i' the white and red," the comely and commonplace daughter of Albion requires a certain severity of vesture. There is many an adolescent woman who never looks at home in anything but a coat and skirt. In a Parisian toilet she suggests a jackdaw masquerading in peacock's feathers, however perfect may be the fit, however exquisite the drapery. A dress that is complex, full of frills, and *sous-entend*, is not the dress for her. Such a gown merely serves to emphasize the obviousness and the insufficiency of her character and her charm, while the rigid lines of her tailor-made toilet seem at least to give her the distinction of a well-groomed horse. You cannot after all get more grace out of a woman than is in her.

Thus if a modiste of genius were to create a design which expressed the maximum of beauty and originality, it would never be accepted by the majority of women as the farthingale and the sack were adopted by the women who wore them. These had as a

rule no personality to express, only sex and nothing more. But now that education has developed individuality in the women of that class wherein dress is regarded as an art and a delight, raiment has become like religion a matter of private judgment. The uniformity which characterizes the clothes of the imitative middle class has nothing in common with the harmony of style which distinguishes the Renaissance or the Napoleonic eras. The main spring of the first is vulgarity, of the latter, sympathy.

The most perfect manifestation of the individualistic ideal in dress is that intangible quality called in all languages "chic." It is a purely personal characteristic neither to be analyzed nor acquired, but whose presence is very readily perceived even by the uninitiated. Women of all ages have possessed it, for it is quite independent of nationality and period, also quite distinct from either wealth or beauty. Those old enchantresses, Cleopatra and Mary Stuart, whose fabled loveliness modern research

has disproved, must have owed their successes to their "chic." The idea of being unrolled from a mass of drapery at Antony's feet was an extremely "chic" idea, and so was that serpent of old Nile's dramatic death. Another woman born in the purple who had the instinct of "chic" was Marie Antoinette with her toy farm at Trianon. Although "chic" is in a measure an infernal gift, many of the great courtesans of history had not a trace of it. Diana de Poitiers and La Pompadour were princesses of "chic," and so were the frail ladies attached to the court of that lout James I. On the other hand Louise de la Vallière and her rival Mdme. de Montespan were quite devoid of it. Of the Reynolds and Romney dames the most "chic" were Lady Elizabeth Foster and the audacious Miss Chudleigh, sometime Countess of Bristol. Both Emma, Lady Hamilton, and Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire, were prevented from being "chic" by their faultless beauty. Women with profiles or divinely tall figures are rarely "chic," by the way.

In the world of art there are a few artists who have immortalized "chic." Among the old masters of painting, Lionardo's Madonnas are as "chic" as Titian's Venuses, Botticelli's "Simonetta" is full of a perverse "chic," and so are the portraits of Paride Bordone. Of modern painters, there are only two who understand "chic," and they are Jan Van Beers (the "chic" of the demi-monde) and Mr. Sargent (the "chic" of refined elegance). In English literature Beatrix Esmond and Diana of the Crossways are the most perfect exponents of "chic" I can remember, and in French all the heroines of De Maupassant and Bourget possess the quality in a greater or less degree. The Ibsenitish woman is as a rule too desperately in earnest to be in the least "chic." Indeed, an infusion of this indefinable characteristic is almost as rare in art as in life, which is perhaps due to the fact that men as a sex fall down like leaves before genuine "chic" in woman. Style in dress is the element that impresses them most vividly and which attracts

them most potentially, whereas material and fit are usually lost upon them. And "chic" is a peculiar essence of style, bearing about the same relation to it as spirit does to soul.

III

On Color in Costume

IN the art of painting, the great colorists of the past live by virtue of their color sense alone, and in the art of dress, the spoil is to her who seeks their ideals and learns their lessons. Yet it is quite marvellous to observe how little importance women, as a sex, attach to it. I have often noticed that a woman's favorite tints, those which she wears most frequently, are the very colors that nature never mixed for her benefit. If the tone is wrong, moreover, unsuitable to the wearer or to the occasion, no perfection of style or fit will save the dress from failure. Thus to discover what colors to wear and what to avoid should be part of the feminine education, and any preference for those banned by the laws of harmony should be ruthlessly quenched at

the outset of her career. In this matter, however, no real decision can be arrived at without a minute study of the individual. The conventional rules which assign blue to the blonde, and red to the brunette, are as untrustworthy as conventional rules generally are. For the tone of the hair and skin is not the only determining factor; much depends on the expression of the face and the cast of the features. Then again different shades of the same color demand different types as wearers, for the woman who looks well in verdant tones of blue will find those which tend to gray or lavender utterly destructive. There are "fair ones with golden locks" to whom, in defiance of tradition, yellow is an ideal background, and "rare pale Margarets" who are at their best in white.

This last observation leads me to a consideration of those reasons which have made the "*Symphonie en Blanc Majeur*" into an ideal of feminine dress. In the first place all the supreme moments of a woman's life—her birth, her marriage, her death—are clad

in white. It forms in its simplest manifestation her first garment and her last, and witnesses in more sophisticated texture the compact which seals her life to felicity or to sorrow. The selection of white for those momentous occasions is due, I imagine, to its symbolic significance. Different nations invest colors with different meanings, but all have, I believe, concurred in adopting white as the emblem of blamelessness. The idea generated, I suppose, in the Orient, where the sun's rays suggest that the garb of the inhabitants should be as pure in tone as it is scanty in size. And as life is apt to stain the dress and the soul alike, the pristine condition of the former may have grown quite naturally to symbolize the latter when it is equally without spot or blemish. White has meant innocence, it would seem, since the world began, before ever the arts of womanhood and costume were learnt; and still in this decadence it means innocence, and woman in wearing it feels some affinity with the sweet and the virginal. Nor, indeed, does she forget that whiteness typifies youth

as obviously as purity, and therein lies the secret of her devotion to it. In these days more perhaps than in any other, the pride and the prize of life is to the young. To a woman youth and love are synonymous, and happiness generally keeps in their company. She dreads the advent of age as she dreads nothing else on earth, knowing that Time is her worst enemy, and that, fight how she may, the victory will be his in the long test. Frequently, this fear urges her to go on wearing white long after her age warrants its adoption—which is in woman almost as abject a confession of despair as the indiscreet application of cosmetics. To see a white robe hung on a few aggressive bones, or stretched round a mass of “too, too solid flesh,” is one of the most poignant of “life’s little ironies”—a folly which goes further than anything I know of to support the theory that women have no sense of humor. There is no color which must be worn with such discrimination as that “white samite, mystic, wonderful,” for a frill too much or a flounce too long is

sufficient to destroy all the mystery and the wonder. Even youth itself is not always a justification, for white has a pitiful way of exaggerating the defects both of complexion and of figure. A sallow face will look its worst when reared up over a white frock, and on the usual gracelessness of sweet seventeen it has no mercy. Actual beauty is not necessary; but a certain *beauté du diable*, made up of sanguine flesh tones, and a shy aplomb, is essential to the successful wearing of white, or else the rich tints and contours of mature loveliness.

Thus there is a sort of prestige attached to this colorless vesture, that explains the reluctance with which women admit that its claims are not for them. The acknowledgment that red or blue does not suit them costs nothing, but the average maiden would rather die than place white irrevocably on her *Index expurgatorius*. She will mitigate its terrors with colored trimmings, deepen its glow into cream, and sally forth elevated with the sense of at least a partial triumph. Few,

indeed, are they who, even in youth's heyday, dare to don the white robe of a blameless life in all its blinding purity with never a ribbon to aid them in the enterprise. By lamp-light, of course, less courage is needed, for colored silken shades, those friends of the featureless, bring a white toilet within the reach of many who would not dare to risk it in the uncompromising light of day. With this climate, it is, in fact, rarely permitted to walk in white beyond the length of a boudoir, so its true mission is to paint the lily in some festive evening hour. But one could write without end in the key of white — white whose supernatural quality made Edgar Poe hate it; whose chill made Keble banish all white flowers from his garden. I fancy, however, this aversion is rarely shared by women, who, unlike men, always judge of colors in relation to themselves.

There is another color, the mournful antithesis of white, which few Englishwomen will consent to eschew, although not two in twenty should tempt fate by wearing it. From the

tradition that black is becoming to every one, I beg most emphatically to dissent. To trace the history of black in relation to English dress, the causes of its adoption and popularity would be, I think, a study of vast interest. Its general use is, of course, entirely a modern habit, more or less coincident with the enthronement of the Hanoverian dynasty. Gradually it has become dissociated with the occasion, though never with the idea, of mourning, until every class of the community is as devoutly attached to the hue of decay as a nun to her habit. Half the gloom of this dismal city is due to the sable garments of its inhabitants. Think for a moment how different the aspect of London would be, if blue or red were the habitual wear. There is nothing after all to be said in favor of black. Its utility cannot be pleaded, for dress material is more expensive in black than in colors, and does not wear nearly as well. Personally, I also look forward to the day when it will not be necessary to increase the depression consequent on the loss of your nearest and

dearest by wearing unbecoming clothes. Black as a background for points of color may be endured, but unrelieved black is as grewsome as a pall. In respect of mourning we are however improving. It is no longer requisite to throw color to the dogs for your fiftieth cousin's exit. Even when the late lamented comes within the prohibited degree of kinship, the period of compulsory crêpe is now measured by months instead of years. These regulations have of course nothing to do with private feeling. The wearing of mourning is a pure convention, and although genuine grief may be reluctant to resume colors, the adherence to mourning dress is generally in inverse proportion to the sorrow of the mourner. There is, in fact, endless humbug connected with this habit. You may rejoice at the timely removal of a discreditable relative, yet custom requires you to trick yourself out in the habiliments of woe, the depth of your crêpe keeping pace with the sincerity of your thankfulness. It is rather naïve perhaps to take exception to humbug

where woman's dress is concerned, but when you have the poignant conviction that black adds at least ten years to your apparent age, and that you have a plethora of quite useless relations who must die some day, one is apt to feel keenly on the mourning question.

"Sweet is a legacy," as Byron puts it, and when a demise enables you to enter into an inheritance it is incumbent on you to express gratitude by a respectable show of *crêpe*. Unluckily, however, people who have anything to leave either exhibit a reprehensible desire to survive you or else ignore your claims to remembrance in their wills. In the latter case one might seize a legitimate cause for mourning, but as nothing for nothing is a deep-seated principle in human nature, one is inclined to neglect the acknowledgment of a kinship that failed to give a substantial reminder of the tie. The wearing of mourning has, in fact, as I said, become nothing but a superstition, the empty form of a sentiment which frequently does not exist, one of those manifold conventions that hedge a woman. As far as the

upper classes are concerned, mourning is merely an excuse for a galaxy of new garments, the wearing of which will enable one to assume a fresh attitude towards life. Thus, a black dress made by an artist and sufficiently elaborate to admit of various tones of black, supplemented by a manner that has a thought of chastened sadness in it, may be invested with a beauty all its own—the soul of a song conceived in a minor key. Any dress that is sufficiently distinctive to draw out a phase of femininity that would otherwise lie dormant has a right to exist. Therefore, as a vehicle of expression, mourning has its uses, though we may be forced to confess that the thing expressed is not invariably a compliment. Black is apt to accentuate the imperfections of the flesh. In this way it is as revelatory as white. A woman who passes for pretty when the tones of her toilet are just the right shade to emphasize the bright lights in her hair, or to conceal the borrowed lights in her complexion, will stand revealed both plain and painted, when she has nothing

but dead black for a background. To be "black and comely" is indeed a supreme achievement.

Only in the lower classes do we find that sensational relish of death, which is more or less a natural instinct, and which in the early stages of the world's history was doubtless common to all men. It seems like a reminiscence of a primitive civilization, where the expression of emotion was less restrained and where a scantier population made death a delay of activity, however brief. In these days of competition at least ten men are waiting to step into the place of a dead comrade, and the work of the world goes on with scarcely an interval. All this tends to destroy the tragedy of death and the importance of the individual. "Nobody is ever missed," said Talleyrand, and every day the cynicism seems to get truer. And as death sinks to the level of a mere incident, its passionate significance becomes restricted to those who benefit or suffer by it. So, however deeply persons of culture may mourn in their

hearts, they make less of the outward signs of sorrow, knowing that it will interest no one but themselves. These remorseless convictions do not however come within the perception of the lowly, who still regard the wearing of mourning as a sacred privilege, the disregard of which no depth of poverty can excuse. A family who can just manage to keep body and soul together will face starvation rather than the contempt of the neighbors by attending the funeral without the necessary garments. No social stigma attaches to being wedded in colors, but to bury your friends in colors is an indecency in the eyes of the respectable poor. What is that but another indication of the dramatic possibilities of death in the uneducated mind?

At the very beginning it seems probable that the long arm of the Church arrogated to certain colors an inward and spiritual meaning. It is therefore worth while to consider for a moment the influence of theology on the garments of women. Probably the most ancient and obvious demonstration of this

influence may be found in the symbolic robes of the priestesses of Isis and the vestal virgins of pagan Rome. Throughout the world's history the habiliments of those women who were consecrated to the service of religion were selected to typify the virtues which their vows encouraged them to practise. The nun's veil reminded her constantly of that humility to which she must school her spirit; the coarse texture of her robe of that poverty which held all things in common. In secular life, again, an unwritten law enjoined a change of dress in accordance with the fasts and festivals of the Church, almost as rigorously observed as the ordained change of food, even by those who set little store on priestly blessing or anathema. In our day and in our land this altering of costume to the events of the ecclesiastical year is limited to that class of women who spend their existence in following the forms of religious ceremonial, and to the lower middle class, whose uneventful lives supply them with few secular occasions of sartorial inspiration. To have a special dress

for Sunday is the privilege of the proletariat, and orthodoxy both of faith and dress seems to exact that it shall be new on Easter Sunday. It is curious to observe how even the most extravagant women feel impelled to discover an occasion which shall furnish an excuse for a new toilet. For when a man merely says "I want a new hat," a woman always adds, "to wear at such-and-such a function," proving once more her eternal disposition to dress, not for herself, but for a cloud of witnesses. So when she has not a ball or a race-meeting to justify her seeking another costume, she takes Sunday for a mild stimulant and Easter Sunday for a positive obligation to surpass herself in the invention of a new symphony in chiffons.

In this case the Easter garment seems also to have become more of a convention than a religious sentiment, a conclusion which is reinforced by the fact that those women who inaugurate the change by a prelude of Lenten half-mourning belong to quite a different class of society — the class which produces the elegant

devotee. Women of this type cultivate the beauty of holiness quite as much for the beauty as for the holiness. They attend matins and evensong, and keep the Lenten fast with a piety that owes not a little of its fervor to the fact that it is clad in semitones of gray and violet fashioned and adjusted with consummate art. They observe the forty days' vigil with a picturesque prayerfulness that deceives no one—not even themselves. It must be admitted that Lenten dress is a fashionable fantasia to which the Parisians are much more addicted than we. A certain integrity in the British character, and a plentiful lack of imagination, make the religious pose repugnant to us from the moral point of view, while we do not perceive its æsthetic possibilities. In Paris, on the other hand, the most frivolous worldling is the most alive to the fascinations of an interlude wherein liturgic simplicity of attire makes a piquant contrast to former and following luxury. She puts on with her Lenten sackcloth an air of disillusion, and the drooping mouth of a repentant Magdalene, which is not

devoid of sorcery. She does the thing well, of course—as well as she does nearly all things in which only the externals are touched, and the most superficial emotions, though in another way these Lenten toilets are pregnant of meaning. They say many things besides the pretty penitence which is their most obvious intention. They mark the transition between winter and spring, a period of indecisive hues and tentative expression, when nature is full of delicate and evanescent colors. It is not every woman, however, who can translate these tones into her gowns with impunity, certainly not her whose individuality requires reinforcement from her clothes before she can hope to differentiate herself from the crowd. Neither is the woman of radiant complexion quite the ideal wearer of our modern equivalent for sackcloth. Either the contact with a color negation quenches her own tints, or their dominance robs the garment of its vital characteristic. She who is specially designed by nature for Lenten dress is the divinely tall and most divinely pallid maid

who is more emphatically a daughter of the North Sea than of the gods. She can clothe herself with the grayest of grays, the coldest of mauves, and draw out all their mystical loveliness, until she looks like Hans Andersen's Ice Maiden and the "Lady from the Sea" rolled into one fair wraith of humanity. I once knew a woman — she was a Russian — who never wore anything but gray. Whatever the season or the climate, she adhered to her moonbeam draperies, made in every style to suit all the emergencies of life. The effect was distinguished beyond anything I ever saw. As a great French writer has said of Aimée Desclée, all women looked common or commonplace beside her. And this she owed to her neutral-tinted toilet alone, for there was little distinction in her large form and her thick Slav features. I must say I admired her hugely for it; it argued such extraordinary dramatic sense, as well as considerable self-control. In the winter, she told me, it was easy; but with the bursting blossoms of spring a temptation seized her to exchange her gray for the colors

of youth and love. But she, being wise, had resisted, and it counted unto her for perfect taste and an exquisite originality, none of which things she possessed in any great measure. For her it was always Lent.

For many women, however, such abnegation is neither lawful nor expedient. They have, by some nameless law of being, an inalienable right to the fulness of color as to the fulness of life. Sensation for them takes the place of sentiment, and they can no more stay their hand while blue is in the sky and green is on the grass than they can barter the beat of their pulses for a mess of tranquillity. It is they who inspired the great colorists in the past, they who are the great colorists of the present. All the kingdoms of tone and tint are for them, and the riches and the glory thereof. But as the gray ladies are few, so are there not many out of the great horde of women predestined to "the purple and the queendom and the gold." The rest will wear black persistently till the whiteness of the last toilet enfolds them — that black which with a strange

concordance stamps upon the body the infinite monotony of the soul-face. Occasionally the dictates of fashion tempt them to pirate the brilliant colors to which no physical or mental attributes entitle them. There is only one word for a woman so dressed, which Pope Gregory XIV., who was an artist in words, once used in quite another connection. I do not, however, apologize to his spirit for calling any manifestation of the modern woman a *deliramentum*. It fits many of them so perfectly—a fact which Gregory would have been the first to acknowledge. That he never used it himself in reference to things feminine was simply that he had not the chance. The women of his day were divided into two classes—those who were models for pictures of the Madonna and those who wished to be.

IV

On the Expression of Extremities

ALTHOUGH the central idea of dress is situated in the clothing of the body, it is the extremities which give an entire toilet significance and articulation. The attention of the beholder is first attracted to the person by the head, and riveted there by the action of the fingers and the feet. To the casual observer the head is the person, and its aspect engraved upon the memory forms the only definite impression of individuality associated with your name. Very few people after all see you steadily and see you whole. To do so argues the presence of the critical faculty — a rare gift when one considers humanity in the mass. As a rule the vague perceptions of the average acquaintance revolve around the head, absorbing the face and the quality of the hand's

pressure. Thus by the head you shall know and be known of them, its beauties and its shortcomings accredited yours forever. So on the principle that only a very rich man can afford to wear a shabby hat, only a very pretty woman can afford to wear an unbecoming one. Given a good hat, gloves, and boots, *sans peur et sans reproche*, and you have won more than half the battle which an elegant woman is ever waging against those of her own sex whose aspirations are the same as her own. The woman who does not "arrive" generally owes her defeat to a defect in the extremities—boots of the wrong cut—gloves that have been cleaned not wisely but too well, or more often a hat which suggests the amateur, or worse still, the inferior professional hand. Nowhere, indeed, is the second-rate quite so fatal as on the head. A badly-made dress is beneath contempt. One can, if one tries hard, ignore it altogether, as well as the person inside it. But a hat that is an "outsider" is simply an insult, something that one cannot help

resenting, like a beggar on horseback. One has strange impulses towards those feathers where no feathers ought to be, those wildly improbable bows and irrelevant flowers. It is bad form to refer to Ibsen, but you will remember how Hedda Gabler felt about Thea's hair. She thirsted for its annihilation, and that is just how I feel when I meet a hat that is a parvenu with pretensions. So if you cannot afford to get your hats at a good shop, at least do not get them at a bad shop. Some women who are clever make their own hats, having previously spent an hour or two in Bond Street absorbing ideas. Those who are not clever should see that their maids are so, and trust to their machinations. I have always believed in the moral influence of bonnets, and am convinced that half 'Arriet's degradation is due to her hat. I once bought a hat in Brussels that had no principles whatever. Only to take it out of its hand-box seemed to induce a tendency to "go fanti." It was so uncanny that I gave it away to an enemy who was going abroad. Sometimes

I wonder if it has brought her to the gallows yet.

"Why do good women always wear large hats?" asked the hero of *The Green Carnation*, but I see no reason to admit that good women *do* wear large hats, or that magnitude of brim necessarily implies magnitude of virtue. For uncompromising rectitude commend me to a close-fitting bonnet of black straw with black velvet trimmings—not of course the nurse's bonnet, which can be made to convey an idea of sheer depravity with its brazen bow, and uplifted veil. The bonnet which terrorized me in childhood had not even a smirk in its rigid bows, as unlike those twisted by the frivolous fingers of fashion as anything could be. I don't know whether its wearer was a good woman, but she was strictly evangelical, which, to some people's thinking, is the same thing, and for unrelieved ugliness I never met the equal of that bonnet. A large hat, on the other hand, is quite beautiful, provided the garniture is properly balanced. One may, therefore, take it for granted that there is a

spice of original sin in it. What vacillation lurks in the undulations of its brim, full of little wayward curves that defy things accepted and orthodox, suggesting a pliant optimism which lends itself with a will to the impulse of the moment! The picture hat, moreover, has lived hard, has memories, perchance regrets. Its golden age dates back a century or more, when in velvet and feathers it graced the powdered curls of Gainsborough's lovely ladies, and even borrowed the great painter's name for a souvenir. Still further back its associations are of King and Cavalier, where the silken doublet and velvet cloak of knighthood bore it company—gay days made gayer by Roundhead curses and Puritan caps. But what boots it, i' faith, to have been ever on beauty's side, for a flippant philosopher to misjudge you in the end? To be identified with the inartistic disarray of the art student were surely shame enough. The picture hat as well as the picture seems to have fallen on evil days. Certainly it has regrets.

For, truth to tell, the type which created

and had need of the picture hat, is well-nigh extinct. It was a type that had a profile and a presence, graces now as rare as first editions; a type with neither a problem soul nor political prejudices, whose only duty was to gather life's roses while she might. We have long since revolted from that ideal and lost our profiles with other things in the fray. So as the picture hat implies the profile, or should do so, it will be seen that its day of grace is practically done. A deterioration in noses is mainly responsible for the toque, the sailor, and what I may call the lower forms of head-gear, whose vivacity is supposed to make up for their lack of intrinsic dignity.

In the selection of hats, the tint and texture of the hair upon which it is to be super-imposed, must of course be considered — must never indeed be ignored. For the poetic utterance that "beauty draws us by a single hair"—established once and for all the supreme value of her tresses in the list of a woman's charms. Her features may fail of classic regularity, her complexion may suggest other

comparisons than that of the traditional milk and roses, but if, like Browning's maiden of Pornic, "she has her great gold hair," she may safely challenge the hard impeachment of uncomeliness. Indeed, nature, with her universal law of compensations, rarely adds the crowning glory of beautiful hair to a face that is lovely enough to dispense with a gorgeous frame. Sometimes she will bestow a cloud of curls as atonement for the indignity of a tip-tilted nose, or some marvellous glint of fire on the head to make up for colorless cheeks. But then, on the other hand, nature is never sufficient; even in her most generous moods she can but supply the raw material. It remains for civilization to supply the coiffeur, that divinity who shapes our hair, who completes the handiwork of nature, and corrects her mistakes at the same time. Whereby it will be perceived that in these days the raw material does not count for much.

As a matter of fact, woman has not always been permitted to exult in the beauty of her hair. The social philosophy which grew out

of the graft of Christianity on to the Oriental idea demanded a veil for the feminine face which should also conceal her tresses. St. Paul promulgated that doctrine, and the Church indorsed it in every coiffed nun who relinquished her hair, as well as the world, the flesh, and the devil. In the days when the pictured Madonna was the supreme expression of the typical woman, Botticelli gave his Virgins nothing but the demurest braids, though the tresses of his Venus are flowing around her. The Madonnas of Angelico, Perugini, and those other painters who perpetuated the religious idea, have no hair to speak of, nothing but a severe coil peeping through their ample veils. When Lionardo Da Vinci and Andrea del Sarto came to paint the mother of Christ as a woman rather than as a symbol, they demonstrated her humanity by loosening her hair. Years later, in the decadent hands of Guido and his school, this characteristic came to express a mere soulless excess of materialism, but the original idea had been pure enough. This is a large sub-

ject, and at present I only want to point out that the tendency of religion was to hide a woman's hair, as if temptation lurked in every curl, while the tendency of humanity was to reveal it and revel in its luxuriance. Your true artist is after all something of a pagan at heart.

Where indeed was this spirit manifested more plainly than in the days of the Royalist and Roundhead? Whatever charms the Puritan maidens possessed — and they do not seem to have been many — profusion of hair was not among them. Her lank locks escaped the ribald admiration of the gay cavalier under the rigid folds of the cap of modesty. The Stuarts on the other hand set such store on curls that the men rivalled their fair adherents in the length and abundance of their love-locks. This enthusiastic appreciation for the natural crown of woman has, no doubt, something to do with the stanch partisanship which the sex has ever since professed for the cavalier cause. Was it not one of those close-cropped Puritans who first enjoined womanhood to "suckle fools and chronicle small beer"?

We have, at all events, in this rebellious day, long since discarded the Roundhead conception of the whole duty of woman, and even got past the insouciant license of the Stuart curl. We still desire to make the most of our hair, but we arrive at that end not by letting our hair down, but by putting it up, assisted by the science of the coiffeur and the friendly aid of the hairpin. Not that the coiffeur is a modern invention. In the days of the first Georges, the duties of the hairdresser must have been much more onerous than they are at present. Those monuments of coils which Reynolds and Gainsborough have immortalized must have taken many an hour to build, especially with the adjuncts of powder and pearls. The result, I find, however, inexpressibly fascinating. There is a valor in that "wonder of flax and floss" which our loose knots fail to suggest — something of that nameless fine leaven of which the maiden up-to-date conveys no hint. It is inseparably associated with a period of graciousness and grace, "planned courtships made perfect," and

all the glory of flowered pannier and silken petticoat — of black-patched and red-heeled coquetry. When that beauty of twisted hair looks at us from a portrait by Gainsborough, or a miniature by Cosway, the most distinguished flesh and blood seems charmless enough by its side.

In the art of modern hairdressing the only adepts are the French, and their most conspicuous achievement is the invention of artificial undulation. By the skilful manipulation of an iron instrument, that exquisite ripple which nature gives to about one woman in a thousand can be imparted to the straightest of tresses, bending them to the line of loveliness even against their will. This process has had the effect of still further simplifying the disposition of the hair, which now entwines the head in naïve coils or unsophisticated curls, arrested by the caprice of fashion anywhere between the crown and the nape of the neck. The bombastic taste of the English, assisted by the commercial instinct of its hairdressers, has struggled somewhat against this fashion, which

exacts art rather than artifice from its ministrants. The tide has nevertheless set in against those catafalques of false hair which were once a joy to both coiffeur and client, who are now devoting more attention to the color of the hair than to the disposal of it. Time was when no woman within the pale of respectability would have dared to try experiments with the tint of her chevelure. But of late years the feminine patrician mind has begun to realize that there is no moral difference between choosing the color of your costume and the color of your hair. This is another point on which nature generally fails to acquit herself nobly. I can never imagine why she is so prodigal of brown hair, and so chary of burning it to red, deepening it to black, or paling it to gold. Perhaps brown hair is made on the same principle as snub noses, wide mouths, and dull eyes—the principle which fixes the price of beauty as above rubies. The color of hair certainly reflects in a degree the character of the individual, and so brown matches the monotonous mediocrity

of the mass. Flaxen hair, as a rule, argues a temperament that is cold, but often tenacious and intellectual, while a certain amount of ardor and energy is supposed to accompany ebon tresses. A famous actress once told me that she became quite a different woman when she put on a black wig—a fierce creature whom she scarcely recognized as herself. I have since wondered whether women who dye their hair find a corresponding change in their character. But as no one will acknowledge the first transformation, it is not easy to interrogate them concerning the second.

The recent exaltation of red as a superb hair-color was devised, I fancy, by Rossetti, whose "Veronica Veronese" and all her sisters are saturated with the modern spirit. In the dark Georgian days, and later, Titianesque tresses were execrated under the opprobrious epithet of "carrots." But the loveliness of that rich ruddy hue has been confessed whenever the artistic consciousness has been bent to the pursuit of truth and of beauty, as in Venice of the Cinque Cento, and again, in late England,

when the Pre-Raphaelite movement generated another Renaissance. Its fascination is, at all events, not so obvious as that of the golden curls which are now admired and emulated only by the second-rate in vice and vulgarity. Even "The Fair One with Golden Locks" would have now no chance beyond the hallowed pages of the fairy tale. Altogether the tangles of Neæra's hair is an enthralling subject, with more in it than is dreamt of in our shallow philosophy. What agony there is in the thought of losing them, of watching them wither at the touch of the blanching hand of age. There is something sadder, methinks, in the wreck of luxuriant hair than in the loss of any other beauty. Think of all the glorious curls that the grave has covered.

"Dear dead women with such hair too,
What's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms?
I feel weary and grown old."

Passing on to the consideration of another extremity, I can only remark regarding gloves that she who buys them ready made does so at

her peril. In reference to foot-gear it would be difficult to say too much. There is a delicious little sonnet written by a young French poet in a decadent vein wherein he eulogizes the superior attractions of woman clothed to woman when she is described by artists as "the undraped model." He adores the music of rustling skirts and the gleam of eyes through the filmy folds of a veil. Last of all he loves "*les chers souliers nerveux qui font de petits pas.*" Feet, as nature made them, do not interest him. Even Trilby's famous ones would have left him cold, and he would certainly have found her list *pantoufles* "an intolerable deal of sack." I can even imagine that this misguided poet could gaze unmoved upon the feet of Burne-Jones' virgins as they follow each other down the golden stairs. For him the old Greek goddesses stand marble-white in vain, nor would any nymph in any picture divert his attention from the window of a shoe-shop. Life that passes like a play of glancing feet in the hurry of the streets, where a muddy day gives unusual opportunities to the student, or in the contem-

plation of the ballet, where "woven paces" provide a perfect feast of feet, must have a distinction all its own — a peculiar paradise, an isolated inferno. For the location of the latter I have no doubt that poet would be sent to England for his sins.

The feet of Englishwomen is one of those topics on which the wit of the world has been expended. There has never been, I imagine, a humorist in any country who has not at some time or other made our feet the butt of his satire. Their leviathan proportions, their flat and springless tread, and the inelegance of the boots that cover them has passed into a proverb. Théophile Gautier once said that even in the most beautiful woman there was always some feature on which you must turn your back if you would preserve the illusion of beauty. So to save the blessed belief — if it is worth saving — that your countrywomen bear away the palm for loveliness, you must never let your eyes wander below the knee. In these days of ample petticoats, this mortification of curiosity becomes easy. And if perchance you

have to help the maid of the moment into her carriage, you can always take Gautier's advice and turn your back upon her toes. After all, when the foot is persistently shrouded from the public view, its beauty depends almost entirely on its size, color, and shape being undiscoverable in any case. Many centuries of leather and prunella have converted the feminine foot into something which nature certainly never intended, but as this is probably true of every part of the female form, it does not much matter what nature proposed, since woman has disposed with remarkable success for the eternal subjugation of man. For the modern foot there is "nothing like leather" fashioned by a boot-maker who knows his business and has ideas beyond a sole and upper that will stick together till you arrive at the age of velvet slippers. A foot, moreover, can be too small for beauty, just as a mouth can be, though such are rare. If it is so, the body has a top-heavy appearance that spoils its symmetry. A high instep is essential, arching from toe to ankle, for a low instep is not only ugly in itself, but induces

an awkward gait. Slenderness is another requisite, though a thin foot which does not spread outwards towards the toes is a very undesirable feature. At the same time few women are heroines to their shoemaker, and if he is an expert and your feet are of moderate dimensions, you should have no reason to blush for them.

There are not many tradesmen, however, either in Paris or London, who are able to impart to a shoe that nervous contour which our poet loved and sung. The ideal shoe is full of conscious curves and pliant folds that receive the impress of the foot, and make it look like a human feature, not like a block of wood—an effect frequently produced by the angles of the English boot. The sole being bent backwards to outline the heel not only reduces the size of the foot, but makes a curve where an angle would otherwise be. Most women who value the beauty of feet wear the Louis XV. heel on their indoor shoes, but it is not considered good form for street boots to be cut after this pattern. There is of course no earthly reason why we should wear un-

V

On the Invisible

EVEN if we are nearly all agreed that marriage is a failure, the conviction does not prevent our adorning ourselves for the sacrifice. Dress is, after all, one of the great compensations which inure a woman to the manifold disabilities of her sex, and when it takes the form of a trousseau one can only regard it as the jam which enables one to swallow the pill of matrimony without a grimace. The pleasure of accumulating a plethora of chiffons, the excitement of the chase after fair raiment, are, after all, part of the preliminaries of which Rochefoucauld said, "*Ce ne sont que les commencements qui sont charmants.*" With a trousseau to accomplish, one has no time for those dangerous reflections on the possible "amazement" of the end, no time to weary of

your affianced before you get to the altar, no time to analyze your emotions and discount their sincerity. I verily believe that no trousseau would, in nine cases out of ten, mean no wedding. It is the tempering of the wind to the lamb about to be sheared, an extenuating circumstance that does something at any rate to mitigate the severity of a life-sentence. That portion of a trousseau which has no public career before it merits the tenderest consideration and the most liberal expenditure. If you have only a small sum to disburse, curtail the cost of your gowns and the number of them rather than stint yourself in the matter of lingerie. Like the king's daughter of Scriptural fame, every woman should be "all glorious within." It is a duty she owes to herself in point of principle, and to her husband in point of expediency. One lives up to one's clothes or down to them, and you cannot expect to be a superfine creature if the invisible part of your attire is out of harmony with the externals. There is an amazing amount of nonsense talked in this country whenever an Eng-

lishwoman is bold enough to break the conspiracy of silence which modesty is still supposed to exact in this matter, although the advertisement columns of the ladies' papers have long since divulged every fictitious mystery of feminine attire. There are still, I dare say, many worthy women who are unable to divorce virtue from ugliness in their minds, and to whom a lace petticoat is as much a badge of infamy as the cigarette is on the stage. If you ask them why, they have no answer, but in their hearts they are absolutely convinced that purity is inherent in calico and everlasting trimming, and quite incompatible with cambric and lace. You may point out to them that the cut of a chemise is not a question of morality but of taste, which will only make them doubtful of your reputation, and more confirmed in the evangel — so popular in England — which believes in the ethical value of everything, from a toothpick to a reel of cotton. For the husbands of those women one feels a pang of pity, tempered by the reflection that they are probably indulging

a natural taste for lace petticoats in a less immaculate ether. Even the best of men are slaves to externals. To ignore the fact is folly; to deny it is sheer cant, and the wife who thinks she can afford to dispense with an appropriate setting to her beauty is either very ignorant or very vain. If a man is impervious to the charm or inelegance of women's garments, what does it prove? Merely that he is deficient in a sense of beauty, has limited sympathies and no refinement of mind. The finer a man's nature the more sensitive he is to impressions; if his wife does not give him agreeable ones, he will go where he can get them, and the fault will be hers alone. Yet when a woman of this sort discovers her husband's infidelity she poses as a martyred angel who has been sacrificed to a brute, instead of realizing, in the dust and ashes of repentance, that her ridiculous prejudices and her inadequate trousseau are mainly responsible for the disaster.

As for the woman who has no husband to consider, her lingerie leaves most things — except perhaps cleanliness — to be desired.

There is to my mind an indescribable vulgarity in the idea that the invisible portions of one's toilet need not match the visible in elegance. In the case of a girl with an allowance it is generally the old story of the outside of the platter; and if you should ever be present while her toilet is in process you will sustain a shock when a lovely gown is insinuated over repulsive-looking natural-wool combinations, and petticoats that must have been squalid even in their first youth. This whited-sepulchre condition is not so much the result of lack of fortune, but of want of refinement. To a great extent it is a question of training, for very few girls are made of such fine fibre that beauty is the natural craving of their hearts, unless they are taught to appreciate and make a habit of it. Yet I wonder how many parents realize that the clothes they provide for their children's wear mould their character as much as anything else. In these days of cheapness there is no excuse for ugliness. One can of course spend a fortune on lingerie, but on the other hand it is possible to get dainty garments for a few

shillings. There are people who defend inelegance on the score of hygiene, but the question arises what is the most healthful fabric to wear next the skin? On this vital point the advocates of sanitary underclothing are at variance. The air is full of exhortations, but when the interpreters of a new gospel disagree how shall any believe? The advantages of wool as a means of physical salvation find a persistent exponent in Dr. Jaeger. This evangel Dr. Lahmann, the apologist of cotton, spends a lifetime in denouncing, and Pastor Kneipp, who declares that "wool is the enemy of mankind," throws his influence into the scale against garments fashioned from the animal fabric. Meanwhile the world awaits an ultimate definition of the term hygiene as applied to clothing, and in the absence of such woman at least may elect to regulate her attire according to the laws of beauty. The emancipated brigade again are never tired of telling us that the light and airy superfluities comprised under the general term lingerie will soon be as dead as Queen Anne. Women will then be

clothed, so say these reformers, on the "distinct cylinder" system, and the old-fashioned graces of elegance and dignity will be shed with the last chemise. Already the underskirt is menaced by the knee-breeches and gaiters that are exposed in every shop window. That they are more convenient for pedestrians in the country or when the pursuit of some sport permits us an interregnum of sexlessness, I do not for a moment deny. But happily the feminine tradition is not carried on either by the pedestrian or the sportswoman, and so long as there is one woman left who loves the empire her beauty gives her, the petticoat will remain to enhance the mystery of the sex that patented it.

The corset, "our help in ages past, our hope for years to come," has likewise been attacked by these promoters of the hygienic "boom," backed up by an inconsiderable section of the medical faculty. Because a few foolish women cannot resist the temptation to reduce the size of their waists to an inhuman disproportion, they condemn the corset altogether, which is

analogous to the teetotaler's denunciation of wine, because some people drink to excess. Tight lacing is not only contrary to the laws of health, but also to the laws of symmetry, and therefore deserves all that can be said against it. But to attribute all slenderness of contour to undue compression is simply another demonstration of the malice that ascribes every fresh complexion to the use of rouge and pearl powder. Centuries of corset-wearing have bred a race of women whose bodies are very differently proportioned from the form of the Venus di Milo. In the upper classes small waists have become, like small hands and feet, largely a matter of inheritance, and can be preserved without extravagant coercion. When women are injured internally by wearing a corset, there are two invariable explanations. Either the corset is a bad corset, cut upon unscientific principles, or else she draws the lace tighter than it was ever intended to be drawn. It is true that a great many of the corsets sold in England — sometimes the costliest of them — could scarcely fail to injure

the organs of the foolish women who wear them, in the interests of what they imagine to be a beautiful figure. Those stays which compress the body above and below the waist with the purpose of elongating the latter, not only give their wearers the ridiculous appearance of trussed partridges, but force the most delicate internal organs into an unnatural position, which may result in lasting injury and disease. At the same time, I maintain that a well-cut corset which supports the figure without pressing either upon the bust or hips is not only harmless but necessary. The bands and swathes devised by its enemies merely encumber the body without supporting it, while the braces which throw the whole weight of the clothing on the breast and shoulders are likely to prove as injurious as the worst corset. A large or a long corset is always a mistake, destroying as it must do all the grace and suppleness of the body. In fact, a stay whose presence is obvious when the wearer is fully dressed is, however eminent its maker, wrong, both æsthetically and hygienically.

A discourse on the invisible may, it seems to me, be fitly terminated by a word on the evidences of things usually unseen. For the curtailment of the corsage of our conventional evening dress is another thing occasionally objected to on the grounds of health and morality. The bitterest foe of the décolletage is the British matron, and who dares to disregard that august impersonality? I have often speculated concerning the genesis of this titular deity, who certainly had neither part nor lot in the old creation, if one may judge from the portraits of women since the beginning. The pictures of Lawrence, Etty, and Hoppner exhibit a minimum of bodice on the persons of their fair sitters. Lely and Kneller are worse sinners in this respect, and so for the matter of that were Titian and Rubens. Those court beauties and others who were immortalized by Lawrence and Kneller had a very real and definite existence. We may assume that they were painted in their habit as they lived, and if the artist made the most of their charms he certainly never presumed to inter-

fere with their costume. There was, however, no British matron in the ancient days to stigmatize those bodices as indecent, and therefore it never occurred to any one that they were so. The morals of that period may have left much to be desired, but the spirit of the time was not corrupt. It has taken a British matron to educate this century to its present high standard of mental depravity. As a natural consequence we have become punctilious about shoulder-straps and trifles of that sort. Although our queen with her invincible common-sense has no sympathy with these prurient pretences, ladies who care to plead the excuse of ill-health or advancing years may now shelter their bones behind an extra tucker when they appear at Court. For dinner at home, the matron of the younger generation is wont to envelop herself in some confection akin to the tea-gown species which her mother in the days of her youth would have considered inexcusable in an invalid. Even at the play there is now a tendency to wear sumptuous toilets cut to the throat

after the continental fashion. On the whole we were never so well stocked with fig-leaves as we are at present, and let us hope that our morals have improved in proportion.

From the dressmaker's point of view, the décolleté case resolves itself simply into a question of adipose tissue. This may be a narrow view to take of a problem that has shaken civilization, but it is certainly a common-sense view. The builder of costumes is well enough acquainted with lovely woman to make allowance for the savage instinct which the philosopher persistently ignores. If the British matron were a tangible feminine entity, she would, I am convinced, be as thin as a herring, and her diatribes against the décolletage would be merely the outcome of a natural desire to conceal a too prominent anatomy. When the becoming is also the virtuous, the zeal of the advocate needs no encouragement, and there is no fear that woman's instinct will ever play her false on this point. She will always support any fashion that happens to emphasize her physical perfection and to conceal her

defects, and only in moments of perversity — not of propriety — will she deviate from this course. If her proportions are sylph-like she will do her best to incubate a vogue for as much bodice as may be. But should she rejoice in the possession of fine shoulders, she will take every opportunity of showing them, though the shrieking sisterhood should shriek till they weary out the sun. The point then arises of how much shoulder she shall show. That will depend, I opine, on how much she understands of the gentle art of fascination. Women dress, it is true, primarily for the benefit of their own sex, but they adjust a décolletage for the edification of the other. She, however, who is really proficient in the science of sorcery will never commit the artistic crime of beginning her bodice too late, having realized the important truth that men are not attracted so much by revelation as by suggestion. When I see a woman with no bodice to speak of, I take it for granted that her powers of fascination are elementary, and her taste more faulty than her figure. For it is

taste after all that should and does regulate this vexed question of costume, as others appertaining thereto. And taste is a gift of the gods, like violet eyes and a good accent, and other unpurchasable things.

In the days of our foremothers, a different standard of taste prevailed. They were less sophisticated mentally, and perhaps more opulent physically. A good deal may be said for the theory that modesty is only the consciousness of imperfection. Certainly the women of a century ago were not modest according to the modern meaning of that word, and I am certain they had on the whole finer shoulders. We are content to be décolleté in the evening, but they came down to breakfast in low bodices with short sleeves. In a picture that hangs near me a fair ancestress of mine is depicted walking in a prim garden, dressed in a gown of sprigged muslin, and white satin shoes. There is very little bodice and less sleeve, and I wish I had inherited her shoulders. She carries a fichu, which is not allowed however to fulfil its mis-

sion, but depends coquettishly over her wrists instead. Her contemporaries were, as I said before, more robust in mind and less angular in form. Neither had they then learnt to confound bodices with morality to the utter destruction of both. For my part I wish we were more like them — especially about the shoulders.

VI

On the Superfluous

ONE has sometimes occasion to rejoice that the eclipse of the instinctive woman is not a total one. Even in the brand-newest specimen of the modern Eve there lurks, at all events in the days of her youth, certain saving characteristics which the waters of civilization have not quenched. Whatever may be the superficial tendencies of her nature, every woman is at heart a barbarian, and there is that in her which proclaims her affinity to the primeval representatives of her sex. True, the savage instincts which survive are the less amiable ones, still they are human instincts, and as such serve to leaven the lump of perverted intellectualism which now bears a feminine image and superscription. Yet our critics are never tired of girding at them as if

the reproach of barbarism were a real dishonor. To me there is something alluring in the idea that the prehistoric woman and Madame Nowadays are united, if only for a moment, in a community of sensation. One of these eternal instincts shows itself in the character of personal adornment, which has changed not at all with the change of centuries. The feathers of birds were as popular a decoration to the primitive female as they are to the daughter of this generation, and so were the bright stones that glitter in the light. *La belle sauvage* would barter her best for a string of glass beads, and in the modern mart is there much that a diamond necklace will not buy?

Breathes there a woman with soul so dead that the sight of a rare jewel will not rouse her to enthusiasm? Whether it is reposing in a sanctuary of velvet or scintillating on the person of a rival, a spark of its fire leaps up into the eyes that behold it. We are acquisitive in certain directions, and one of them is diamonds. In the trinity of most coveted pos-

sessions furs and lace are two elements, but the first and the most coveted is gems. They are one of those things by which women measure success in their sex. If the natural hunger after jewels does not seem to be abated by a brace of rings and a few brooches, there is something rotten in the state of that household. There are, of course, women who really do not care for jewels, but they are only to be found among those who have more than they know what to do with. But when I hear a woman who has none deriding their attractions, I know it is a case of "love shackled with vain longing," and I pity her. There are also a great many people who possess jewels, but are ignorant of the art of wearing them. To select the psychological moment for unlocking your jewel-safe requires an education in itself. In plain daylight, good taste demands that they shall only be minutely present, if at all, and then only when you have a function of some magnitude to attend in the afternoon, a drive in the park, or a bidden guest to receive in your boudoir. Light, however, is

not the only consideration; season and locality have to be taken into account. The diamonds which can be worn in May would look inapposite in November, when social life is less formal and momentous. In country houses jewels are rarely in evidence; indeed, the prudent send their more precious treasures to the bank before leaving town, so that they may journey with a light heart. But it is impossible to lay down a law what to wear, and when to wear it, in this matter. The well-bred know by instinct; the others learn, I suppose, from observation of the socially fittest. It is always, however, wiser to abstain than to exceed the limit.

Given the right occasion, one must never produce the impression of being bedizened. Why is it, I wonder, that the woman who sprinkles her person with every trinket she owns, unconsciously betrays the fact to the acute observer? There is an elation about her, coupled with an anxiety as to the effect of this mobilization of her jewel-case. Then there is certain to be a lack of harmony be-

tween the individual items in the display. Here we reach an important axiom in the art. Never juxtapose your jewels unless it be with diamonds, which dwell in amity with any gems. If you own a sapphire brooch and a bracelet set with rubies, make up your mind before dressing which you will leave at home; to wear both would be to neutralize the effect of both, and to impart a bullionish air to your appearance. Only the *nouveaux riches* mix their jewels and their wines nowadays. To be *chic*, one must be exclusive, all along the line. Your toilet also should influence the selection of your ornaments. The simplicity of white chiffon can be emphasized by a string of pearls, or utterly sophisticated by the sanguine glow of a ruby or the evil verdure of an emerald. If you are of the exotic type, there are subtle jewels from the east, or old French enamels, beautiful things full of mystery and memories. In this way your jewels will look as if they were part of yourself, not excrescences upon your gown, without meaning or relevance. A Frenchwoman once said to me that Eng-

lishwomen always seemed to be imperfectly acquainted with their clothes. This remark might be applied with equal truth to their jewels, which are generally worn with even less coherence. To wear diamonds that have obviously come out of Bond Street with an Oriental tea-gown or an Empire costume is a sin of which no aspiring artist in dress should be guilty.

It is not every one again who knows how to buy jewels. The first thing naturally is to have the price of them at your bank, but that is only the first thing. There are many other qualities besides wealth essential to the acquisition of jewels that are really things of beauty. To begin with, your taste must be perfect and your knowledge of the history of ornaments at least sufficient to enable you to select designs of grace and dignity. I am not alluding now to the person who has fifty pounds to spend on jewels, but to the person who has thousands. These purchasers are however rare, and are more intent on securing perfect stones, that will prove a good investment for

their money, than on finding an original setting for them. Nor indeed will the more modest buyer find his task any easier, for the great drawback to the English jeweller is his utter lack of originality. There are quite as fine stones to be had in this country as in Paris, but in point of setting there is no comparison. Instead of desiring something different from every one else, the average Englishwoman wants something just like every other woman's, only more expensive — larger stones, and more brilliant. The result of this demand produces an eternal sequence of commonplace designs — stars, hearts, butterflies, *ad nauseam*. Oh! this perpetual striving to be like this or that woman, or another woman! How pitiful it is! Why not try instead to be like yourself?

In every detail of the feminine toilet one encounters this fatal policy of imitation. There are even women who will patronize one well-advertised perfume after another with as little scruple as the Vicar of Bray evinced in his change of religion. It was Carlyle, I believe, who said that the best smell was no smell at

all, but as a matter of fact there is no such thing as a negative in scent. Every corner of the globe, every house upon it, as well as every living creature, has its own peculiar smell, entirely unlike every other place or person, only in some cases it is strong and penetrating, and in others so faint as to be almost imperceptible. In the case of the individual the personal fragrance is in some wonderful occult way a revelation of himself, an aroma of the spirit that not all the ablutions in the world can wash away. It is as much a part of ourselves as our complexion — much more so, indeed, when one is referring to women. Of course in all this health counts for something as well as the state of our mind and morals. *Bon santé sent bon*, as a French philosopher once put it. But it is not every one, alas! who is mentally and physically robust, so a lack of natural fragrance is the origin of perfumery as a profession. Instead of generating our own perfume we buy it in bottles muzzled with white kid and tied up with ribbons. Whether the expédient is a success or not depends upon the

quality of the scent and the taste of the person who applies it. Mazarin, we know, found the fragrance of a rosebud too strong for his nerves, and I must admit that I find the odor of one or two fashionable perfumes too much for mine. Thus, if perfume does not express great refinement, it generally expresses great vulgarity. Scent in excess is, of course, always objectionable; never let any one "smell you coming," as I once heard a man say about a certain lady whose whereabouts could be detected within a mile radius by reason of her inordinate affection for "Frangipanni." And is there not the tragic end of Sardou's wicked Countess Zicka to remind one of the dangers attendant on the use of a pungent perfume?

If you desire to realize the poetic quality of scent, adopt one perfume and never abandon it. To change your scent is a banality, to mix it is a crime. The society novelist has harped upon the romantic possibilities of perfume till we are rather inclined to resent the idea as suburban. But every sentiment, even love

itself, is susceptible of vulgarization, so one need not cast it aside on that score. Nervous temperaments are always sensitive to the influence of scent; so having once identified yourself with the odor of a flower, rest assured you will never be quite forgotten. Your lovers may love and ride away, but if ever their atmosphere becomes permeated for a moment with the aroma of heliotrope, or stephanotis, or violets, just so long will their hearts return to adore your memory. For a perfume once yours is always yours to those who have ever realized the bond. 'Tis a sweet conceit after all, although it is not so easy to possess yourself of an odor. A few dabs of essence on a handkerchief will not do it. It must emanate from your whole person, not be located in your pocket. To this end you must secrete packets filled with the perfume in powder in all the receptacles where your garments dwell. They must live with the scent that you want them to assimilate. It should also be sewn into the linings of dresses and hats, and at least one packet should be provided for every drawer

and shelf, and the scent renewed as it becomes exhausted. Only in this way can the right shade of fragrance be obtained, a breath, a suggestion of a blossom, subtle and elusive. I know an American woman, a daughter of the luxurious South, who is massaged with perfumed oil every morning after her bath, and to this habit she attributes the exquisite elasticity and the aroma of her skin.

It is but a step from the scent of a flower to the actuality, and the association of the feminine and the floral idea is as inevitable as a natural impulse. Both belong to the beauty of life, or should do so, though hyperculture seems inclined to bring both perilously near to the province of the merely grotesque. The analogy is not far to seek between the orchid, with its morbid coloring, fantastic form, and poisonous charm, and that type of woman whose eccentricities are in the world's mouth, yet there may be some comfort in the reflection that the brevity of the floral monster's life is also another point of similarity. There are other women, how-

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the complete feminization of flowers. One sees in the basket woman, delicate of contour, gaited to be colorless with creamy introspection, one. The carnation, the rose and the pansy belong essentially to her of complexion white and brilliant flesh-tones, a very pale among flowers, serene and passionate, as form is the obvious commonplace that qualifies a feminine substantive with adjectives deduced from the child's innocence — "lilies and langues" is an alliterative poet once phrased his opposition to the alliance of "roses and rapiers" — "weak snowdrops, modest violet, and the rest." On vital occasions too, woman can change, rent the flowers of the field, or rather the pot-house, to minister to her personal attractions. What is a bride without her orange blossoms, or a débutante shorn of her bouquet? The significance of individual blossoms we have in this prosaic present come to regard as a strained sentiment belonging to the period of simpers, crinolines, and the Georgian virtues. The "Language of Flowers" now an amorous study only in the servants'

hall. "I may not speak in words, dear, so let my words be flowers," said once a lover with a garland of Jacqueminot roses, and finished the declaration in perfervid alexandrines instead of leaving the roses to reveal his secret in their own symbolic silence. Perhaps he was a modern lover who had realized Angeline's growing antagonism to both the inarticulate and the symbolical. She likes but little here below, and least of all an admirer with his heart too full for words, even if he patronizes a good florist.

Nevertheless it is always unwise to let your passion for flowers run away with your sense of the fitness of things. The hair is, I opine, not a suitable place for the poisoning of posies, and I trust the foolish fashion of inserting a totally irrelevant blossom in its coils is not approaching revival. Nor is any bodice improved by the addition of a garland of real blossoms to its permanent fripperies, for though the association of flowers and the fair sex is delightful, the beauty of the idea depends on the freshness of the flowers. In a heated

ball-room the brief life which is the crowning charm of floral loveliness becomes briefer, and a withering posy nestling in a mass of chiffon or hair is quite sufficient to blast the prospect of the most perfect toilet ever woman wore. The dissolution of a daisy may be a minor tragedy, but the impression of decay is as easily conveyed by a fading flower as by any other expiring thing.

Shall we, then, turn from the real to the artificial for consolation and embellishment, pinning our faith to a Parisian milliner and a rose of crumpled silk to our breast at the same time? It is often argued by those women who have, or fancy they have, a soul above chiffons, that the fadeless flowers of fashion have no right to exist, and that their adoption is a fault of taste. This is, of course, equivalent to asserting that all imitations are vulgarities, which is, I think, saying too much. Granted that most of them are, and that no self-respecting woman ought to yield to the spurious attractions of velveteen, seal plush, or anything that unsuccessfully pretends to be

what it is not. But I contend that the vulgarity lies, not in the fact of imitation, but in the blatancy of it. We know when we see a hat trimmed with flowers that they are not transient, natural things; but it is merely custom, not the unnatural appearance of the flowers, which brings us to this conclusion. On the contrary, French flowers could scarcely be surpassed for beauty or fidelity to the ephemeral blooms whose charms they perpetuate, and as such they are only vulgar when worn in excess, just as natural flowers are vulgar when there are too many of them on a dress or in a bouquet. Something more of the necessary illusion is preserved if we limit the activity of our artificial flowers to those seasons when their originals are "all a-growin' and a-blowin'." To a great extent this consideration has influenced the fancies of fashion, and no well-dressed woman would imperil her reputation by wearing violets after the little floweret has disappeared from the woods. Daffodils and roses generally adorn our bonnets coincidentally with their début in the hedgerow and the

garden. Flowers have sometimes unaccountable effects, and certainly all are not successfully imitated. To my mind, there are some which make the wearer look old — why it would be hard to say, though there is no more obvious reason why myosotis and marguerites have that youthful air about them which they undeniably possess.

VII

On the Ideal

AS the supreme evidences of character are revealed in the trivial, not in the tragic, moments of existence, just so are the supreme evidences of taste to be sought for in the details of dress, rather than in the actual garment. If a woman has the wealth and the wit to employ a celebrated dressmaker, she will, for the sake of her own reputation, see that her client does not err greatly as regards generalities. Upon the details, however, she is free to work her own will, with no guide but her own sense, of the fitness and the beauty of things. Here neither her dollars nor her modiste will prevent her from destroying the effect of her costume by an offensive latitudinarianism in gloves, or the disastrous adjustment of a veil, if neither natural taste nor acquired art have shown her

the universal rule. It costs the finest taste is a instinct. The inner style is an emotion, but a high appreciation of commonness will save most women from fashion, and any ribbon will do for the ornament of stockings is as good as another. I must never be forgotten that the most insignificant adjunct to the toilet is a detail. Little is the success of the toilet itself. It should be a harmonizing the whole as can not be made into melody, or as each detail must blend the colors on a painter's palette making its individuality but not its importance in the finished symphony. When regarded from the point of view one can realize that it is the art of dress. A discordant detail is a misadventure and that it is almost better for a woman to be poor to ensure that it is luck. For these multitudinous details take up more time than the average woman has to spare, and the worst of it all is that those who best understand the art have no time to practice it. The happy is every who have that rare and costly *goodness*. — *There* — it is in the case not of the, even how to enjoy it. If they were

all adepts in the arts of living and dressing, I suppose I should not be writing essays, whose main object is to show my own sex how to get as much out of existence as is in it. I am constantly meeting rich women who get comparatively nothing out of life, not because fate has dealt treacherously with them, but because they do not realize how to make the best of themselves, either mentally or physically. Unless a woman is a seeker after exquisite things fondly imagined by temperament, she often lacks the energy to vary the monotonous tenor of her way and of her gowns. And although at threescore years she may look a score younger, that will not avail her much if she has not mastered the grammar of life in her youth. It is better to wear out—to adorn the body and the soul “while skies have color and lips are red”—than to rust out, prolonging the tardy winter that has followed a wasted spring.

In this connection the mind drifts naturally to those divers resources wherewith women seek to perpetuate the semblance of youth. Of all

the feminine arts the use of cosmetics is probably the oldest, and the chances are that it will endure to the end of ends in spite of the opprobrium which the renegades of our own sex and the reformed rakes of the other have heaped upon the practice. There is, of course, in this country a contingent of plain women who object to cosmetics on principle, and who, when asked for an explanation, always refer you to the death of Jezebel. But the wicked queen of Israel met her doom not because she painted her face and tired her hair, but because, as the Scripture expressly states, she had slain the prophets of the Lord. The question is not one of morals at all, but of æsthetics, in which the end invariably does justify the means, and wherein excellence is not measured by motive, but by result. The only justification a painted face requires is that it shall be beautiful, which in this case means that it shall not look painted. Thus if cosmetics are used with discretion and with art, so that their presence is scarcely perceptible, their adoption need simply depend on the strength of

each woman's desire to retain the bloom of adolescence. And the women who seek in this way to repair the ravages of time are generally those who have most to lose by the blasting of Time's breath. To the ill-favored, age is never so ghastly a spectre because youth is never so keen a delight. The temptation to use cosmetics argues the possession of something worth preserving, except in the case of the girl who "makes up" more out of caprice than with deliberate intention. As to the rest there is, as I said before, no more reason for always wearing the same color of hair than for adhering strictly to dresses of one tint. Everything depends on the way in which it is done. A palpable imitation is always an unpardonable sin, whether it be a jewel, or a flower, or a complexion — neither is worse nor better than the other.

I sometimes wonder whether in any future of fair and far-seeing, women will cease to get their ideals of elegance, like their clothes, ready-made. Among those things as yet hid from her eyes are the wonderful possibilities of

dress, not as a means of creating impressions, but as a vehicle of expression. The first quality she learnt when the world was young, the last she still fails to discern, though the world is in its dotage. Yet the most transient of her emotions, the most capricious of her moods, may find an exquisite and ultimate expression in her dress. To the average woman this sounds like the dogma of an effete philosophy, but is it? Dress only becomes a triviality when we in our ignorance make it so. In the golden age of history it was a power. "The toilet of woman with all its refinements is a great art in its way. The periods and the peoples who have practised it to perfection are the great periods, the great peoples." That voice is the sublime voice of Ernest Renan. "Had it not been for the lovely and fantastic dressing from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries," says Ruskin, "neither French, nor Florentine, nor Venetian art would have risen to anything like the rank it reached." Never until these decadent days has carelessness in dress been accepted as an indication of

intellectual vigor. The greatest minds have often been extraordinarily susceptible to the influence of apparel. Wagner found such inspiration in silken shirts that even at his poorest he was unable to dispense with them, or the gorgeous coverlets under which he was accustomed to lie sleepless. "One feels as if clothed with the sun," wrote Balzac, in an ecstasy of delight over a new dressing-gown, shot with gold, and brocaded with palm leaves. Neither was the gentle Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, whose views of life were widely removed from the tempestuous imaginings of either Wagner or Balzac, impervious to the charm of clothes. "Take a real woman," says he, somewhere, "at her best moments — well-dressed enough to be pleased with herself, and not so resplendent as to be a show — and what has social life to compare with one of those vital interchanges of thought and feeling with her that makes an hour memorable?" So if we have a low idea of dress it is nothing to our credit, for a perfect toilet reaches the same level of art as a great symphony or a glorious

poem, though it may not share the same intrinsic immortality. Nevertheless, to create a costume that is a work of art is far better than to create an inferior picture, or a sonnet that does not scan, for in every perfect costume there is an atom of axiomatic thought which will live beyond the dated day of its decease, and become incorporated sooner or later in a new design and a new garment. There are many women who might with advantage desist from writing bad English, and interpreting bad music badly, to exhaust the artistic resources of their nature on the designing of dresses that should be worthy of them. To achieve this end would be to add to the beauty of life, and no higher aim can inspire the dreams of genius.

To recognize the claims of the ideal in life may be a pathetic fallacy, but in the art of dress it is the narrow way which leads to eternal loveliness. Fashion is a deity to the unimaginative and the commonplace, but to the woman who arrives fashion is merely a slave, a tool to be utilized or disregarded at

will, and never, never to be obeyed. The elect change the design of their dresses, because the principle of *sic transit gloria* is dear to them, not because their milliners crave after affluence, as some profane critics of womanhood have it. The majority, however, are always wrong in the things that pertain unto chiffons as in the things that pertain unto life — especially wrong when they ignore the great law of affinity, which rules the greater sphere and the less. This law is twain as regards the latter. To come within the province of art a gown must bear a harmonious relation to its wearer and to its environment. The dress of the ordinary Englishwoman, be it ever so costly or so well cut, is ineffective, because it is absolutely without meaning or intention. One feels that it is a casualty chosen at hap-hazard for fashion's sake, with no idea behind it, instead of being — as the ideal dress must be — the complement to and expression of her personality, every drapery significant and every seam inevitable. At least half these accidental garments are to be seen on the backs of women who have

aspirations towards elegance, and who would sell their souls for a new sleeve pattern. Having got it, they would wear it exultantly, with never a thought as to whether it was designed for the proportions of their arm, or whether it dwells in amity with the rest of their apparel or person. As often as not half of a costume will be as casuistic as a *New Review* article, and the other half as flippant as a story in *Pick-me-up*; and if the wearer is conscious that her toilet is not a success, the cause of its failure escapes her utterly. Herein lies the true inwardness of the Frenchwoman's transcendent success in the art of dress—she understands how to impart an esoteric significance to her clothes. Each of her gowns is selected and worn to express a definite idea. If it looks spontaneous, one may be sure that it is meant to look spontaneous, and sufficient unto the hour is the garment thereof. The dynasty of the man-milliner endures for the same reason—a reason expounded in detail by the first of the *demi-vierges*, Paulette, in “Autour du Mariage.” Worth had in his best days a pro-

found appreciation of affinity in dress. As soon as he had accepted a new client he set himself conscientiously to study, not only the lines of her body and the tint of her hair, but every personal habit and idiosyncrasy. As a result every one of his costumes was a separate invention, and in the day of his prime a "separate ecstasy" as well.

There is, however, another kind of affinity which the Parisian does not understand at all, which was undreamt of, even in Worth's philosophy. No costume should be accounted perfect unless it has been designed for the occasion, root and branch, as well as for the wearer. Granted that it is not easy to bring your toilet into divine accord with the lisp of leaves and the everlasting hills; but that is no reason why one should don an incongruous Paris model, and write oneself down well-dressed. With dresses designed for indoor wear it is otherwise. You are on good terms with your surroundings, in your own house at least, and can insinuate yourself into the picture without much travail of soul. But

with nature for a stage you are apt to find yourself out of perspective, or an irrelevant patch of inconsequent coloring, like the figures in a chromo-lithograph landscape. An empty room may look forlorn, but nature is never uninhabited when shorn of humanity. A dress that is to be worn on the green grass, with the sky overhead, must be absolutely pure in color, subdued as much as you will, but pure in tone. Keep your muddy half-tints for your boudoir, if you can't do without them. Some women are afraid of pure color. As for those who live in this city, the fog has entered into their souls, and the rest have an idea that the hues of decay impart an air of subtilty to the wearer. But the hues of the flowers and the fields are far more subtle than any corrupt mixture of tone devised by the neurasthenic.

This aspect of the law of affinity is being constantly outraged, partly through sheer stupidity, and partly through the influence exercised by the stage upon English dress, for the successful player is a queen with a wider empire than the most popular peeress.

Not infrequently the latter models both her costumes and her manners on those of her rival, somewhat to the disgust of old-fashioned persons, who can recall a more dignified day. Certainly the stage influences the cut of society's clothes more than anything else. In this country we do not, as yet, even attempt to create fashion. We are content with adopting and adapting the modes of Paris, or copying the costumes which have helped leading ladies to the interpretation of their parts. I remember a celebrated modiste once telling me that within a week after the production of a new play three replicas of the heroine's dress in the second act had been ordered! Imitation is generally the sincerest form of insult, but I fancy the leading ladies take it for flattery. Those of us, however, who are cursed with a rudimentary sense of humor—no woman dare lay claim to more than this—find endless amusement in the spectacle of respectable forty-five arrayed in the robes of disreputable youth, for observe that gorgeous raiment on the stage is the sign manual of the

adventuress. In real life decent women are occasionally clad with taste. But consider the lilies of the footlights, who have small chance of rivalling Solomon in all his glory. White cambric or gray cashmere is to be taken as the dramatic equivalent of innocence, and when this is exchanged for black, we know that the wearer has been basely betrayed. On the other hand, the female villain goes in silk attire, such as the daughter of Philistia envies and reproduces with the assistance of her maid, who studies the details from the pit. Then when the dark deed is accomplished, she goes forth into the drawing-rooms of Bedford Park — a travesty, yet not ashamed.

Perhaps, however, the actual reason why the present external aspect of woman is so often an offence to me, and her future a despair, is not because there is no ideal in her soul, but so many ideals, which is all the worse, because the ideals of women are not mere preferences, like those of men, but passionate enthusiasms. These impulses, when turned in the direction of dress, lead both to the ideal sham of the

“Artistic,” and the sham ideal of the “Rational” costume. The true ideal of feminine dress is founded neither on mysteries nor on pure reason, but on the desire of beauty. Even to write about dress as the subject deserves, requires the soul of an artist, the pen of a poet, a perfect appreciation of the esoteric meaning of garments, and a clear perception of the relative values of sensuous and intellectual impressions. I have tried in these articles to demonstrate what infinite possibilities there are in the art of dress for the expression of emotion, of thought, of entire individuality. It is, I maintain, a great art, only inferior to music, painting, and poetry, because the materials it works in are more perishable. On the other hand, its ethical influence is far greater. A dress might be a robe of righteousness or the priestess of any sin, and whether intentional or no, it is a revelation of the heart and taste of the wearer. As it is, we do not care as we ought for beauty in dress. The average woman never gives it a thought, being quite content to be fashionable — that is, an inferior

copy of some queen of society or the stage. It is, however, possible to be original, yet not out of date, to devise an exquisite garment which shall exhibit perfection of cut and style as well as personality. For the moment, at least, it would seem that inventive genius in the domain of dress is no more. To my mind, the chance of a renascence depends largely on the tone of those who write upon the subject, the ideals they upraise, and the attitude they adopt towards the art they criticise. So far they do not seem to have an idea beyond reporting the vagaries of the Parisian Mahatmas of the mode. But still every year widens the gulf between French models and English modifications. Never perhaps has there been a more opportune moment to formulate a new philosophy of dress. Here and now, however, the moment is not mine, but if the suggestion should stimulate the soul of any, verily, I shall have had my reward.

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